



## Chapter IV

### A PARADISE DISTURBED

IT WAS hardly to be expected that Bengal, a province so rich and prosperous that it was enviously known as the Paradise of India, should remain unruffled by the winds that were stirring the rest of India. The death of the emperor Aurangzeb in 1707 and the uncertainties of the imperial succession had had their effect there too.

In 1701, the ruler, Murshid Kuli Khan—a Hindu convert to Islam—had been sent to Bengal by the emperor as his *diwan*, or revenue collector. His task had been to see that the revenues were maintained and even expanded. The endless series of rebellions which had occupied Aurangzeb for nearly forty years had shattered the economy of the empire and seriously reduced the revenues of the state. The new *diwan* was fully aware that any increase in the revenues of the province depended on the commerce of the Europeans who traded in Bengal, that this commerce was, to use a modern phrase, the only growth-industry in the province. Unfortunately, Murshid Kuli Khan disliked Europeans and, according to a Muslim historian of the times, was jealous of their growing power.

The first to feel the raw edge of his dislike were the English. In 1701, in reprisal for alleged piracies, an embargo had been placed on all European traders in India. In Bengal, the *diwan* chose to interpret it rather widely. In 1704 he seized the English Company's 'factories' at Patna, Kasimbazar and Rajmahal, and demanded a tribute of Rs 30,000 if he were to vacate them. After four years' wrangling, the Company agreed to pay Rs 25,000. Before they had gone so far as to send the money, however, they heard of the emperor's death—and refused to pay after all. The *diwan* replied that, as the emperor was dead, so too were the trade privileges he had granted. Before the Company would be allowed to trade again in Bengal, they would have to pay for permission. By 1713, the *diwan*'s extortions had become so onerous that the English decided to send an embassy to the emperor in Delhi, to ask for his protection. It was

not that they really believed that Murshid Kuli Khan—who had that year become *namab*, or governor of the province—would actually attack them in an attempt to drive them out. On the contrary, they were pretty sure that they could hold out against anything he might send against them, for they had begun adding to the defences of Fort William in 1707 ‘whilst there is an interregnum and no one likely to take notice of what we are doing’. But it was not a battle they wanted. They were in Bengal for sound commercial reasons, to make profits for themselves and for their masters in London. What they wanted were the privileges of trade. They had last been granted these privileges by an imperial *firman* in 1690. According to Mughal practice, all such privileges were assumed to die with the emperor who had issued them, but the English, in theory anyway, never accepted this. As far as they were concerned, a grant of trading rights was a permanent thing, and their unwillingness to accept Mughal practice caused a great deal of friction between English traders and Mughal officials. Still, the English were a pragmatic lot—at times. One of these times was the year 1713, when they reluctantly decided that in face of the *namab*’s intransigence their only protection was to follow Mughal practice and obtain a new *firman*.

It was not until two years later, however, that an embassy led by John Surman and Edward Stephens crossed northern India from Calcutta to the Mughal imperial capital of Delhi. On its way it passed through territory where there was something approaching anarchy. The reign of Bahadur Shah, who had succeeded Aurangzeb, came to an end in 1712. During it, there had been comparative peace, but his death was the signal for a contest of succession in which the *namab* of Bengal was, not unnaturally, involved. The English merchants expected the worst. When they heard of the emperor’s death, they agreed: ‘that we order all our officers of this garrison to be constantly in a readiness, and to see that all under them be ready. And that ammunition be put into the proper places, that are for that purpose on all bastions, and that we keep an extraordinary lookout, and that the gunner mount the mortars, and some great guns be placed on the curtains, also that the Buxie [paymaster] lay in good store of all sorts of grain, and provisions. As for the soldiers we have now about 200 besides officers, amongst which are about 140 stout Europeans, which with the Company’s servants and freemen of this place and the gunroom crew, we think will on any occasion be sufficient to defend this garrison.’ There had, however, been no need for defence, and though the situation still

remained fluid the British had decided to wait no longer before sending their embassy to the imperial court. Nevertheless, the embassy was not really sure what it was going to find when it finally arrived in Delhi. The obligatory gifts it carried to present to the emperor had originally been intended for Jahandur Shah, who succeeded to the throne in 1712. But he had been murdered in the following year, after a period of palace intrigue and violence. The new emperor, Farrukhsiyar, had close connections with Bengal, for his father had been *nawab* before Murshid Kuli Khan, and he had lived for some time at Murshidabad, the capital created and named after himself by the new *nawab*.

When the embassy arrived in Delhi it found that there was still no real stability of power. The new emperor, whom they addressed as 'Lord of the World and the present age' and to whom the president of Fort William was but 'the smallest particle of sand', was a puppet in the hands of his ministers. It took a good deal of patience and a good deal of bribery before the *firman* was finally obtained. The presents the embassy took with them were said to have cost £30,000, and the total cost of the embassy was put at another £70,000. The amount at least demonstrates the value the Company put upon its trade in Bengal.

The news that the *firman* had been granted reached Fort William in May 1717. At once the president and his council resolved: 'It being necessary to make some publick rejoicing upon the advice we have received from Mr. Surman and that all the country may know our *firman*s are actually in Mr. Surman's possession. Agreed that next Wednesday we make a public dinner for all the Company's servants and a loud noise with our cannon and conclude the day with bonfires and other demonstrations of joy which we know will be taken notice of in the Wacka [newswriters' reports] and other publick news papers.'

On the surface, the British had obtained not only a restatement of their earlier privileges but the grant of some new ones as well. The way these had been worded, however, was imprecise. The *firman* stated, for example, that 'all goods and necessities which their [the Company's] factors . . . bring or carry away either by land or water' were to be free of customs duties. It was not made clear whether this applied to the goods of the Company alone or to the goods of its factors as well, a detail which was to cause considerable trouble. There was also a clause permitting the Company to acquire thirty-eight villages around Calcutta and calling upon the *nawab* to sanction



it. Was this a direct order from the emperor, or was it left to the *nawab* to make his own decision? Finally, the *nawab* was to allow the Company to use the royal mint for making coins out of the bullion it imported—an extremely important concession from the Company's point of view. They were able to mint their own coins at their other settlements in India, but these were unfortunately not acceptable in Bengal. The British had been forced, hitherto, to sell their bullion by weight to the state mint and receive local coinage in return. Yet the wording of the new *firman* was once more unsatisfactory. Use of the mint was to be granted only 'if it be not against the king's interest'. Obviously, the *nawab* would be able to make of this what he chose.

The *nawab's* decisions were quite straightforward—no right to coin money, and certainly no unrestricted customs-free trade. The instructions of the *firman* were therefore pronounced applicable only to the Company's own goods and not to those of its servants. This was a very profitable ruling, not to the *nawab* but to the customs officials. Goods in transit had to be examined to determine whether they were the Company's own or the private property of its employees. This gave the official ample opportunity to delay cargoes until a bribe eased them on their way. The Company's servants, in turn, disguised their own private trade as that of their masters. It was a situation where two illegalities might some day compound into open conflict.

The *nawab* also refused to allow the Company to take over the thirty-eight villages around Calcutta. The Company, struggling to enlarge its possessions, bought land through nominees—its own native employees—but continued to pretend that the only land revenue it owed was that for the three villages which had been granted legally in 1698. The *nawab*, who was not unaware of what went on, demanded various payments to square the accounts and the Company had to pay out, though not in full, at intervals over the next forty years as the price of being allowed to continue to trade at all.

Here were the foundations of all the resentments between the English and the rulers of Bengal which were to break into open hostility in 1756. The Company, at least through its employees—and, in the *nawab's* eyes, there was no distinction between them and the Company they represented—consistently defrauded the government of the revenues due to it by passing off private trade as Company's and thus evading duty. Then there was the pretence that the Company was not the real owner of the land it was constantly

acquiring through its nominees. The Company, in turn, resented the constant bribes it had to pay state officials and the frequent demands for tribute by the *namab*. There was also a constant shortage of coined money, which made it very difficult to carry on trade when all transactions were made in cash. The latter situation, however, was to have long-term advantages for the British. In their quest for coin they were forced to turn to native bankers, and it was to be these hard-headed men of business who, in 1757, invited them into a conspiracy to overthrow the *namab*.

The dominant figure among the bankers was the Jagat Seth, which title, meaning Banker of the World, had been awarded to one Manik Chand in 1715 by a grateful emperor Farrukhsiyar. Manik Chand had been responsible for a loan of Rs 10,000,000 which had helped considerably in gaining Farrukhsiyar his throne. Manik Chand was an Oswal, a member of a mercantile community originating in the Rajputana in western India which had spread throughout the country in the seventeenth century. Manik Chand's father had chosen to go to Bengal. The family were not Hindus but Jains, members of a sect which had broken away from orthodox Hinduism in the sixth-century B.C., about the same time as the foundation of Buddhism. Though Buddhism had virtually disappeared from India, the Jains had survived, even if their numbers remained very small. Their influence, however, was great, because they had turned to trade and banking.

In Bengal, Manik Chand early attached himself to Murshid Kuli Khan and had profited from his foresight. His banking house had branches at Calcutta, Dacca, Patna, and Benares. He himself died shortly after receiving his title from the emperor, but his adopted son remained the *namab*'s banker, the treasurer of the government. Under his control was the Murshidabad mint. The revenue collectors made their payments to him. The Europeans were forced to do business with him, as they had done with his father. Though the English had tried over and over again to persuade the *namab* to change his mind and grant them the right to mint their own coin, and though they had bribed some of his officers to attempt to influence him, they were always unsuccessful. In 1721, one of the *namab*'s officials informed them that 'while Futtichund [Fateh Chand, the son of Manik Chand] is so great with the *namab*, they can have no hopes of that grant, he alone having the sole use of the mint, nor dare any other shroff [money-changer] or merchant buy or coin a rupee's worth of silver'. The English therefore had no alternative but

to sell their bullion—which usually came in the form of French or Spanish crowns—at the price Fateh Chand fixed. Though there were frequent disputes over the price the bankers offered, relations between them seem to have been based on mutual trust and respect.

Relations between the banker and the *nawab*, however, may not have been quite so firmly based. The emperor Farrukhsiyar had been murdered in 1719 and so, within the same year, had two of his successors. The kingmakers at Delhi had placed yet another prince on the throne, but this time they miscalculated, and their puppet turned on them. The new emperor, not unexpectedly, was short of money and, no doubt because of the uncertain state of northern India, there appears to have been a general shortage of coin. But despite the upheavals in Delhi, the monarchy not only commanded the respect of many of its governors but also the revenue of some of the provinces. In northern India, at least, there was still the possibility that an emperor might wield enough force to put down any rebellion. The emperor pressed Murshid Kuli Khan for funds. The *nawab* of Bengal was not in favour with the new emperor, nor with the new emperor's chief minister, and the money had to be found. It was said that the *nawab* took what he needed forcibly from his banker.

This was not a particularly wise move on the part of the *nawab*. The loosening of authority at Delhi and the feeling that change was in the air was beginning to affect those who wielded power in the provinces. Bengal, like the rest of the Mughal empire, was ruled by a foreign minority. This ruling élite was not only racially different but of a different religion from the majority of the population. The majority had never counted for much, and Hindu nobles and landowners had rarely allowed religion to separate them from the profit that friendship with their rulers brought. But that applied only when there was real profit to be made. As the military power of the Mughal emperor gradually weakened and as one-time governors of provinces set up what were in fact independent states, there was a place for kingmakers. In central India, it was the Hindu Marathas who were groping towards power. In Bengal, it was the faction of Hindu nobles and Jain bankers.

Towards the end of Murshid Kuli Khan's life he began to sense the veiled threat of rebellion, which he believed came from Hindu elements. There was a certain amount of religious persecution. The families of Hindu landholders who had defaulted on their revenue payments had been forcibly converted to Islam. It was nothing

particularly serious, nor was it part of a general policy of oppression, but it did add another area of tension.

The *nawab's* relations with the British remained a mixture of coercion and cordiality. Local officials interfered with the Company's trade, and appeals to the *nawab* sometimes resulted only in increased interference. The British sought the aid of Fateh Chand. In November 1723 they sent their native broker to the banker 'to represent the unjust treatment, that he may use his interest with the nabob not to persist therein and thereby oblige us to have recourse to our military force, which we should do if he continued to impede our Hon'ble Master's affairs'. But Fateh Chand was apparently not prepared to intervene. The trouble on this occasion had arisen over the Company's trading station at Malda, and though the British defeated the *nawab's* troops and blockaded the river the only real effect of this activity was to harm their own trade. The whole matter was finally settled when the British paid up once more, and relations improved—but not for long. There was serious trouble again in 1726. This time the *nawab* demanded tribute for the Company's disguised holdings of land around Calcutta. The Company's *vakil* (or native agent) at Murshidabad was arrested in order to give point to the demand, and one of the *nawab's* officials threatened to treat all the Company's native merchants in the same way. This, of course, would have reduced the British to commercial impotence as they relied entirely on native intermediaries. The *nawab's* officials did seize native merchants, and the British once again responded by closing the river at Fort William. This time with the aid of Fateh Chand, the matter was settled and once again a compromise was worked out which included a payment to the *nawab* and the release of the prisoners. It was a typical episode in Anglo-Indian relations. The British were making themselves rich on the trade of Bengal, and were at the same time doing their best to defraud the *nawab* of revenue. It was only proper that they should be made to pay in some way.

The *nawab* did not, of course, discriminate only against the British. The French and Dutch were subject to the same tactics, but because their trade was small in comparison, they themselves preferred—for the time being, at least—to play along with the *nawab*.

In June 1727, Murshid Kuli Khan died. He had hoped to be succeeded by his daughter's son, Sarfaraz-Khan, but his son-in-law, Shuja-ud-din, moved with great speed and seized power before Sarfaraz could claim it. Shuja had prepared his way by extracting

the appointment of governor from the emperor in Delhi, and it seems that he had the support of Fateh Chand. Though Fateh Chand had undoubted influence with the emperor, he does not appear to have used it in a positive sense to further Shuja-ud-din's cause, but there is oblique evidence that, even while Murshid Kuli Khan was alive, he advised against recognizing the claims of Sarfaraz.

Shuja-ud-din's reign was one of reasonable stability, although there was a revival of court rivalries. Various parties were manoeuvring for power, among them two brothers—Alivardi Khan and Haji Ahmad—as well as the new *nawab's* chief minister, a Hindu, Alam Chand, and the banker Fateh Chand.

During this period the Company came into conflict with Fateh Chand over a debt incurred by its broker. As usual, it tried to acquire friends at court, presenting the *nawab's* son with a valuable horse, and reminding other nobles—using gifts as a stimulus—that they had at one time or another professed friendship for the Company. But these activities had no success. Fateh Chand was too powerful at court, and, in any case, many of those to whom the Company had appealed were members of the same faction. Naturally, they stuck together, though they did not refuse the gifts. As always, a compromise was reached. The British had no alternative, even though the debt incurred by their broker had not been contracted with their knowledge or approval. Fateh Chand believed that it had been. Both sides had some virtue in their case, but the compromise resulted in a loss for Fateh Chand, and though the British were pleased at having to pay less than had been decided originally, they had made a great error in offending the banker. When next there was a dispute between the Company and the *nawab*, Fateh was unwilling to help.

The British continued to put at least some faith in Sarfaraz Khan and were guardedly optimistic when, in 1739, he succeeded the father who had forestalled him twelve years earlier. But they were mistaken in the new *nawab*. Sarfaraz confirmed his father's ministers in office and Fateh Chand remained the treasurer of the state. The chief minister, Alam Chand, died soon afterwards, however, and was replaced by Haji Ahmad—'prime minister and great favourite', as he was called. On the principle that the English Company's privileges had lapsed at the death of Shuja-ud-din, Haji Ahmad demanded a large sum for their renewal. Later, he requested the customary presents when the emperor confirmed Sarfaraz as *nawab*. Once more, the British paid up. So, too, did the French and Dutch. Then, under pressure from his supporters, who believed quite

reasonably that they should benefit from their master's high office, Sarfaraz Khan replaced Haji Ahmad and reduced Fatch Chand's position at court. In theory, the Company might have been expected to benefit from these changes, but no advantages materialized.

Soon there was a conspiracy under way designed to replace Sarfaraz Khan by Alivardi Khan. Alivardi Khan already had a base from which to seize control of Bengal. In 1736, aided by Fatch Chand's influence at the court of Delhi, he had been appointed governor of Bihar, and from there he moved swiftly against Murshidabad in April 1740. In the same month, he defeated and killed Sarfaraz at Gheira. Fatch Chand's influence at Delhi once more proved invaluable, and Alivardi received a *firman* legitimizing his position as *namah* of Bengal.

This need, by an active conqueror, for a piece of parchment bestowed by an emperor who had himself only just regained his throne after an invasion by the Persian king, Nadir Shah, and who—in comparison with Alivardi Khan—was essentially powerless, underlines the peculiar position of the Mughal throne in the politics of eighteenth-century India. Adventurers might be fully prepared to dispute parts of his empire with the emperor, but once they had taken them away from him they expected, and were prepared to pay for, his approval. Alivardi bought such approval by promising that the imperial revenues would still be paid when he had placed himself on the throne of Bengal.

Alivardi Khan was a ruler of some vigour and perception, but the times were against him. No sooner had he established himself at Murshidabad than he was forced to defend the province against invasion. In 1742 the Marathas, who had become the leading native power in India, turned their attention to Bengal. Alivardi managed to beat them off, but not before Murshidabad and other cities had been plundered. In the following year, there was another invasion. This time there was dissension in the Maratha ranks and the invasion was repulsed. In 1744 the Marathas came again and turned back only after Alivardi had twenty-one of their commanders murdered—at a peace conference. The halt lasted until the following year. This time, Alivardi's Afghan nobles and mercenaries deserted him and sided with the Marathas. Conflict with the Marathas continued inconclusively until 1751, when Alivardi was forced to compromise and cede the district of Orissa to them as well as agreeing to pay an annual tribute.

The disturbance of the normal life of the country for nearly a

decade seriously disrupted the economy. The constant need for money led to extortionate demands on the merchants and landholders, most of whom were Hindus, and a continuous squeeze on the European traders. The way Alivardi had taken over the throne in the first place had also antagonized a large number of the nobles. Together, the effect of internal and external pressures was to loosen even further the unity of the ruling classes. Alivardi seems to have trusted only the Hindus about him, and the influence of the Hindu faction increased considerably during his reign.

During the Maratha incursions, the *namab* encouraged the Europeans to increase the fortification of their settlements. The French erected defences around their principal factory at Chandernagore, and the Dutch did the same at Chinsurah. Both places were on the river Hugli, upstream from the English settlement at Fort William, Calcutta. In 1743, the English began work on a moat round the northern part of Calcutta which came to be known as the Maratha Ditch. The *namab*, however, had no intention of allowing the Europeans to become too strong and when, after he had finally settled matters with the Marathas, the English or the French asked his permission to increase their defences, he replied: 'You are merchants, what need have you of a fortress? Being under my protection, you have no enemies to fear.'

But it was not the *namab*, or even the Marathas, that the Europeans feared. They feared each other. The War of the Austrian Succession in Europe, and the failure of the French and English Companies to remain neutral in India, had led to what was in effect a French victory, even though it appeared as if the English had had everything they lost returned to them by the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle in 1748.

The *namab* was fully aware of what was going on in the south and was determined that the conflict should not be allowed to spread to Bengal. This he made perfectly clear to both French and English. Unfortunately, the English did not believe that the *namab* was capable of defending them against the French. His protection might be adequate against the French in Bengal, but could not withstand a determined onslaught by French forces from outside. Such an attack was by no means impossible. Dupleix, after his successes in the south, wrote to Bussy in 1751: 'Nothing can be easier than to humble the pride of that man [Alivardi Khan] whose troops are as worthless as those you already know. By sending to Bengal, Balasore or Masulipatam four to five hundred men . . . [and]

some light artillery . . . that is all you would need in Bengal, where there isn't a single fort and the whole country lies open to the first glance. By taking a few precautions we could make ourselves masters of Hugli.' And again, a couple of months later: 'The *namab* is hated there because of his vexations. The English and the Dutch are not in a position to give him any help . . . I defy them to furnish more than three hundred soldiers. . . . You are alone strong enough to become the master of the country which is ripe for invasion because of the tyranny of the present government.'

Both the French and English knew that the peace of 1748 was only a pause in the conflict, but among both countries' nationals in India there was a division between those with real—though ill-conceived—national ambitions and those who believed that an arrangement could be arrived at, on a purely local level, so that the profits of private trade need not be interrupted. The Directors of the East India Company in London were anxious to protect their property from the French. They instructed their employees in Bengal to increase their defences, even if the *namab* forbade it. In 1752, they told Fort William to form a militia, and two years later sent fifty-nine pieces of artillery. At the same time, they advised their agents not to interfere in the internal politics of Bengal, however attractive the prospects might seem. 'The death of the *namab*,' they wrote, 'is an event that may on account of his great age be daily expected and as it is highly probable [that] it may be attended with great confusion and troubles in the province before another can be securely seated; we, therefore, recommend to you whenever it happens to take all prudent measures to preserve our possessions, effects and privileges and standing upon defense to observe to the utmost of your power to the strictest neutrality between the competitors.'

At least part of this was known to the *namab*. His aim was to avoid any possible conflict between the French and the English by frightening both of them into keeping the peace with occasional shows of force, though these were always kept below the level of provocation. The Europeans were a source of revenue of which he had no intention of depriving himself by some foolish action. Several of his courtiers advised him to sequester the Europeans' property but he would not listen to them. To Mir Jafar, one of his most trusted generals, he was reported to have compared the Europeans to a hive of bees 'of whose honey you might reap the benefit'. If they were disturbed, however, 'they would sting you to death'.



Khan was profoundly aware of the growing strength of the Europeans and treated them with his own brand of caution. When his nephew voiced support of the general, Mustafa Khan, in believing that it would be an easy matter to despoil the Europeans of their riches, Alivardi replied: 'My child, Mustafa Khan is a soldier, and wishes us to be constantly in need of his services, but how come you to join in his request? What have the English done against me that I should use them ill? It is not difficult to extinguish fire on land; but should the sea be in flames, who can put them out? Never listen to such advice as his for the result would probably be fatal.'

Nevertheless, Alivardi did not hesitate to show the Europeans who was master. When, in 1749, the English Commodore Griffin seized the goods of an Armenian merchant—who promptly appealed to the *nawab* for aid—Alivardi sent soldiers to the English factories and prevented them from trading for six months until they accepted his terms for a settlement. The French commander, Bussy, approached him for an alliance and was rejected, and when Alivardi heard of the death of Nasir Jang in the Deccan in 1750 he threatened to seize the French factories in Bengal and drive their merchants out of his territories.

The French in Bengal were careful not to antagonize the *nawab*. When he told them to stop fortifying their factories, they stopped. Part of the reason for this was that the French were short of funds in Bengal, and most of such money as was available had to be spent in trade. The French merchants, too, were somewhat more diplomatic in relations with the *nawab*'s officials. Furthermore, they hoped that one day the *nawab* would decide to crush the British, which would leave the field clear for them; in the meantime, it was in their interest to placate the *nawab* and hang on until the time came for them to act in Bengal as they had done on the south.

The balance of hostility in Bengal, however, was constantly being pushed out of true by the headstrong attitudes of the English. The merchants of Fort William were forceful and even decisive in their commerce, but they had little or no knowledge of military affairs and certainly no political sense. They constructed fortifications, usually of little military value, and without the *nawab*'s permission; thus they offended him without achieving any compensating increase in their ability to defend themselves in case of attack. More important, they flouted the custom of the country over their holdings of land. In addition to the subterfuges they employed in order to cover up their ownership, they arrogated certain rights which simply did not

exist according to Indian practice. In Bengal the *zamindar*, or landholder, was merely an agent of the *namab*, who collected the revenues for him and maintained law and order. The *namab* retained sovereign rights, and in the final analysis the land belonged to him. The Company, however, regarded itself as sovereign on its own property. Its employees collected taxes, charged their own customs duties on goods coming into Calcutta, operated their own courts of law, and generally behaved as if they were politically autonomous. On a number of occasions they gave asylum to persons accused of crimes in the *namab*'s territory and refused to surrender them to his officials. When, in 1756, the *namab* demanded, according to custom, the estates of two of his subjects who had died intestate in Calcutta, the English refused to comply. The Council explained its reasons in a letter to the Court of Directors in London: 'We can not think of subjecting our flag and protection to so much contempt as to abandon our tenants and inhabitants and permit their estates and properties to be seized and plundered . . . in case this demand is not laid aside we shall be under necessity to withdraw our factory and take proper measures to secure our employees from these impositions . . . we have taken to submit rather to a stoppage of our business than suffer this protection of our flag to grow contemptible.'

This letter was written just two weeks before Alivardi Khan, then eighty-two years of age, had an attack of dropsy which was to prove fatal. During his illness, the British granted asylum in Calcutta to one Krishna Das, who brought with him his family and treasure to the value of over Rs 5,000,000. This act was to precipitate a series of events, some tragic, all significant, which were to lead in the end to the British conquest of Bengal.

## Chapter V

### PERSONALITIES AND POWERS

**A**LIVARDI KHAN DIED on April 10, 1756. His private life was described by a contemporary Englishman, Robert Orme, as very different from that of the usual 'Mahometan prince in Indostan; for he was always extremely temperate, had no pleasures, kept no *seraglio*, and always lived the husband of one wife'. But his public life, Orme added, was 'sufficiently delineated by his actions', which showed him to be basically very much the same as any other Indian ruler of the time. He was ruthless in defending his own position and had built up around himself a faction he could trust; his apparent strength kept rivalries under control. But there were real weaknesses beneath the façade of the *nawab's* power. It needed only a weak ruler for these to become apparent.

During the last few years of his reign, Alivardi Khan's favourite at court was Mirza Muhammad, son of the *nawab's* brother, Haji Ahmad. One source gives the date of the boy's birth as 1729, while another makes it 1736, the year in which Alivardi received the appointment of governor of Bihar. The year 1736 was the beginning of Alivardi's good fortune, which led to his assumption of the government of Bengal, and it is suggested that if the boy was born in this auspicious year it may have been the reason why Alivardi chose him as his successor. Whatever the actual date of Mirza Muhammad's birth, Alivardi adopted him as his successor in 1752 or 1753.

It was on the occasion of his adoption that Mirza Muhammad received the name of Siraj-ud-daula, 'the lamp of the state'. Neither his temperament nor his reputation seem to have lived up to this title. An English observer described him as 'violent, passionate, of great ambition tinctured with avarice'. The mildness of this judgment becomes apparent when it is compared with what one of his own relatives, the historian Ghulam Husain Khan—who provides much of the available information about Siraj-ud-daula—had to say about him. 'Making no distinction between vice and virtue, and paying no regard to the nearest relations, he carried defilement

wherever he went, and, like a man alienated in his mind, he made the houses of men and women of distinction the scenes of his profligacy, without minding either rank or station. In a little time he became as detested as Pharaoh, and people on meeting him by chance used to say, "God save us from him".

Though it must be borne in mind that Ghulam Husain was a partisan of Shaukat Jang, another claimant to the throne, the general view of the time seems to support his opinion. Alivardi was certainly not blind to the faults of his adopted heir but, although Ghulam Husain records that he said, in the presence of the court, that 'as soon as he himself was dead, and Siraj-ud-daula should succeed him, the hat-men [Europeans] would possess themselves of all the shores of India', the only precaution he took was to make Siraj-ud-daula swear on the Koran that he would abstain from alcohol. Siraj-ud-daula rigidly kept this promise but, according to certain contemporaries, it was too late—his mind was already affected by acute alcoholism.

Siraj-ud-daula had not been the only possible heir. There were others with better claims. A long series of deaths, however—both natural and contrived—had left only two who might have disputed Siraj-ud-daula's succession. These were his cousin, Shaukat Jang, and the infant Murad-ud-daula. Alivardi took precautions to ensure that his favourite's succession to the throne should not be challenged, by surrounding him with powerful supporters—the court bankers; Mir Jafar, the commander-in-chief, who was married to Alivardi's half-sister; and the minister Rai Durlabh, a Hindu. Rai Durlabh was bought with costly gifts, but Mir Jafar, a man of considerable attainment, proved in battle, and known for his honesty and loyalty, simply swore on the Koran. Siraj-ud-daula's aunt, Ghasita Begum, had adopted Murad-ud-daula, and all Alivardi's attempts to reconcile aunt and nephew failed, but by the time he died he had done everything else possible to ensure that Siraj-ud-daula should succeed him.

Contrary to all expectations, at least among the Europeans, Siraj-ud-daula did succeed to the throne without opposition. Unfortunately, the English in particular had gone out of their way to offend the new *nawab*. According to the French merchant, Jean Law: 'The violent character of Siraj-ud-daula and the general hatred for him had given many people the idea that he could never become *subadar* [ruler]. Among others the English thought so. They never addressed themselves to Siraj-ud-daula for their business in the *darbar* [court], but on the contrary avoided all communications

with him. On certain occasions they refused him admission into their factory at Kasimbazar and their country houses, because, in fact, this excessively blustering and impertinent young man used to break the furniture, or if it pleased him, take it away.'

It is possible that, after Alivardi's death, the English were in fact intriguing with some of the possible contenders for power. There is no surviving evidence, for or against. Even while Alivardi was still alive, Siraj-ud-daula had claimed that they were plotting with Ghasita Begum, and had offered to prove it. Alivardi apparently declared that he did not believe it, but it is obvious that Siraj-ud-daula did and continued to do so.

Some of the English at Calcutta had been convinced that, as the Begum had bought a large number of influential supporters, she would be able to keep Siraj-ud-daula from the throne. In this, as in so many of their appreciations of affairs in Bengal, they were hopelessly wrong. During Alivardi's last illness, Ghasita Begum retired to a moated palace known as the Moti Jhil, with her lover and a large fortune in gold and jewellery. There she began to collect an army, apparently with the intention of backing not Murad-ud-daula but Shaukat Jang. In this she had the support of Siraj-ud-daula's nominal adherent, Mir Jafar. Her agents tried to recruit European soldiers, and it was reported that a certain Corporal Bailey had joined her with some European deserters. Immediately on the death of the *namab*, Siraj-ud-daula sent his widow, who was Ghasita Begum's sister, to persuade the Begum to submit. Alivardi's widow was accompanied by the banker Mahtab Rai, who had succeeded to the title of Jagat Seth when his father, Fateh Chand, died in 1744 and been confirmed in this honour four years later by the Mughal emperor, Ahmad Shah.

The two emissaries were successful in persuading the Begum to give in. As she had been deserted by her principal military officers she had very little alternative; the rest of the conspirators were so suspicious of one another that they were unwilling to make a move in her support. The Begum agreed to surrender on condition that she could keep her treasure and that her lover's life should be spared. But Siraj-ud-daula intended to lose no opportunity of humiliating possible opposition. The Begum was ordered to retire to the harem, her lover was banished, and her fortune carried off to swell the *namab*'s treasury. A proportion of the loot was, in fact, used to buy off the *namab* of Oudh, the Mughal emperor's chief minister, from whom Siraj-ud-daula feared attack.

With at least one major source of opposition satisfactorily eliminated, the new *nawab* turned his attention to his own court. Mir Jafar, who was undoubtedly involved in the Begum's conspiracy, was replaced by Mir Madan, a Hindu, and spies were set to watch his movements. Another Hindu, Mohan Lal, whom Jean Law later described as 'the greatest scoundrel the earth has ever borne and worthy minister of such a master', became chief minister. He was apparently an enemy of the Jagat Seth, and there was an almost immediate coolness in relations between the banker and the court though no open break. Rai Durlabh continued to enjoy the *nawab's* favour.

The ripples of Ghasita Begum's conspiracy touched the English as well. About the same time as Siraj-ud-daula was taking action against the Begum, he also sent an emissary to Calcutta with a letter demanding that Krishna Das be handed over. This man, who had arrived in Calcutta in March 1756 with his family and a substantial amount of treasure, was the son of Raj Ballabh, the revenue administrator in Dacca. Raj Ballabh was more than just an official; he had been an assistant to Ghasita Begum's husband, and after his death, had acquired considerable influence over the widow. Early in 1756, Raj Ballabh had been asked to submit his revenue accounts for inspection and auditing, as it was believed that he had been embezzling money which rightfully belonged to the *nawab*. While the accounts were under inspection, Raj Ballabh asked William Watts—head of the English factory at Kasimbazar—to take his son into the protection of the English fort at Calcutta.

Watts immediately consulted the governor of Fort William, Roger Drake, who gave his permission. He gave it with such speed and apparent lack of consideration of the possible consequences that it appeared as yet another of those fatal political indiscretions for which the English were becoming notorious. The decision certainly helped to convince Siraj-ud-daula that the English were committed to Ghasita Begum. There is a possibility that some of the English had been bribed. The French were sure of it, though they may have been prejudiced, and the Court of Directors in London later put their own suspicions into writing. They had been, they said, 'informed on good authority that two of our servants of considerable rank actually received from Krishna Das upwards of fifty thousand rupees for our protecting his person against Siraj-ud-daula'.

Shortly before Alivardi Khan died, William Watts—

was close to the capital, Murshidabad, and who had spies at court—came to the conclusion that Siraj-ud-daula's chances of succeeding to the throne were good enough to make it advisable for the British to be cautious. Watts wrote to Calcutta and suggested that Krishna Das should be asked to leave, as his presence there might cause some unnecessary friction in relations with Siraj-ud-daula. Though some members of the Council at Fort William supported Watts, Governor Drake overruled them.

This conflict within the Council was symptomatic of the divisions and enmities which existed among the British merchants in Bengal. No doubt the exigencies of the climate heightened men's tempers, and when those tempers were already sensitive to insult, imagined or real, clashes were inevitable. Pride and avarice may be said to have been the most common vices of the British in India. When they were added to a weak and indecisive character, the consequences could be disastrous. Governor Drake had just such a character. He was only thirty-four years old, but his appointment he owed to seniority, it being the custom for the merchant who had been longest in the factory to become its chief. Drake had held his appointment since 1752, but by 1756 he had still not been confirmed by the Court of Directors in London. His authority, therefore, was often flouted by the other merchants in a way which, as one of them said, 'made him also appear cheap among the natives'. His position was further undermined by the fact that, when his wife died, he married her sister. The same writer commented that this could 'never be forgiven him, for the crime was not only itself bad but that after every man of character and sense shunned and avoided him, and was the means of his running after and keeping very indifferent company, and of committing a thousand little mean-nesses and low actions, far unbecoming any man, much more a governor'.

Calcutta was, in effect, administered by two members of Council, Manningham and Frankland—who were only interested in making their own fortunes—and by Holwell, the magistrate. It is possible that Drake's attitude in the Krishna Das affair may have been motivated by a desire to ignore his fellow-councillors' advice, but whatever his reasons he refused Siraj-ud-daula's demand to surrender the man. He even went further. The bearer of the letter, Narayan Singh, was ejected from Calcutta on Governor Drake's instructions, on the grounds that he had entered the town like a thief and a spy, 'and not like one in the public character he pretended as bearing the [nawab's] orders'. It was alleged that Drake actually tore up the

*namab*'s letter and threw it in the emissary's face, although this seems to have been an invention of his enemies.

Drake had no real excuse for regarding Narayan Singh as a spy, or even as lacking authority to carry such a letter. The emissary had been introduced to him by a Jain merchant, Omichand, who was resident in Calcutta and who had for some years acted as an agent of the British. Omichand had vouched for the status of Narayan Singh. Nevertheless, the intrigues of some of the English merchants had led to Omichand's being deprived of his lucrative position in the Company's trade, and it is just remotely possible that this may have led to his sponsoring of Narayan Singh being treated with some suspicion. Drake—and Holwell, who was also present—may have concluded that Narayan Singh could be an *agent provocateur*. On the surface it appears unlikely, but given the character of Governor Drake and the atmosphere of the times, it is not as improbable as it sounds. Holwell seems to have acquiesced in Drake's actions on the principle that it would be unwise at that stage to antagonize Raj Ballabh and Ghasita Begum.

After his rather high-handed action, however, Drake seems to have had some doubts. He wrote to Watts to say what had been done and Watts, who knew Narayan Singh, regarded the treatment as ill-advised. 'The moment I was acquainted with the affair,' he wrote, 'I dreaded the consequences of affronting so considerable a servant of a young man intoxicated with power and wealth, and who expected an implicit obedience to his will. I therefore immediately applied to all the great men about the nabob to prevent Narayan Singh's complaining, and the affair was seemingly hushed up.' But only seemingly.

Siraj-ud-daula, after his success with Ghasita Begum, decided to move as rapidly as possibly against Shaukat Jang while his rival was still, he hoped, off balance as a result of the defeat of one of his most important partisans. On May 16, the *namab* set off in the direction of Purnea, where Shaukat Jang had his base. Seven or eight days later, having reached Rajmahal, he received a message from Shaukat Jang—acknowledging him as legitimate *namab* of Bengal.

At about the same time, Siraj-ud-daula heard how his emissary had been treated by Governor Drake. He received, too, a letter from Drake in reply to an order he had sent the English, French and Dutch, instructing them to demolish any fortifications they had erected during the illness of Alivardi Khan; the *namab*'s spies had reported that some such work was in progress at all the principal European settlements. Siraj-ud-daula's order was duly acknow- 2



by the Dutch; they had made no real attempt to erect fortifications. The French received the *namab*'s message courteously, replying that 'they had not built new works and had only repaired one of their bastions, which had been injured by lightning'. The English, however, were insolent.

From the reports of his spies, the *namab* was aware that the English had repaired their line of guns on the river side and had built a small redoubt at a place called Perrin's Gardens on the northern boundary of Calcutta. They had also begun to clear some of the debris out of the Maratha Ditch. One of the spies, too, mistook for a fortification an octagonal summerhouse which one of the merchants had erected in his garden. The *namab*'s order had quoted these activities, commanding that work should stop, that Perrin's redoubt should be demolished and the Maratha Ditch filled in. Governor Drake's reply has not survived, and its contents were only orally conveyed to the Council at Fort William some days after it had been sent, for Drake had decided to act upon his own authority and had not consulted the Council as to what he should say. Nevertheless, some of the English merchants—including Holwell—did know the contents. When Drake recounted the general purport of the letter to the Council, some were doubtful as to whether he also conveyed the tone in which the letter was written. According to the governor himself, the substance of his reply was as follows. 'That for this century past we had traded in his [the *namab*'s] dominions and had been protected and encouraged by the several Subahs [*namabs*], always having paid a due obedience to their orders. That we hoped he would not listen to any false representations, and that we depended on his favour to protect our commerce which tended to the benefit of his provinces, as we exported the produce of the ground in return for bullion brought into the country. That he must have been acquainted of the great loss our Company sustained by the capture of Madras by the French. That there was now the appearance of another war breaking out between the French nation and ours, wherefore we were repairing our walls which were in danger of being carried away by the river and were not otherwise erecting any new works or digging any ditch.' This seems a fairly innocuous reply although even if the actual letter followed these lines closely it did carry undertones of insult, with its implication that Drake doubted Siraj-ud-daula's ability to maintain peace between the English and French as his predecessor had done.

There were rumours, which reached Jean Law and were probably

circulated widely at the time, that Drake had told the *namab*'s emissary verbally that if his master wanted the Maratha Ditch filled up it could be done with the heads of the *namab*'s subjects. Whatever the truth of this—and it was by no means out of character—Siraj-ud-daula's temper was roused by this response, as well as by Narayan Singh's report of his treatment over the matter of Krishna Das. If a native historian is to be believed, Narayan Singh said to the *namab*: 'What honour is left to us when a few traitors who have not yet learned to wash their backsides reply to the ruler's orders by expelling his envoys?'

Drake's openly contemptuous attitude to the *namab* could not have been adopted at a more unfortunate time. Siraj-ud-daula had humbled his enemies. Ghasita Begum was immured in the women's quarters, and Shaukat Jang had acknowledged Siraj-ud-daula as the rightful ruler. The French and the Dutch had accepted his orders over the matter of fortifications. Yet here were the English rejecting his reasonable demands, casting doubts on his ability to maintain law and order in his own dominions, and insulting his emissaries. For any ruler, this would have been intolerable. Siraj-ud-daula, so newly established on the throne, was compelled to take action. The slightest sign of weakness would revive old conspiracies and perhaps inspire new ones. The question was, what action to take?

## Chapter VI

### SHOWS OF FORCE

SIRAJ-UD-DAULA SUFFERED from at least two of the vices which are most commonly fatal to autocratic rulers. He was both timid and rash. Over the provocations of the English, however, he acted with sensible caution. He was more convinced than ever that the Europeans, and especially the English, were planning to do in Bengal what they had already done in the south, but he had no doubt that they could be prevented from this course by the same methods as his predecessor had used. Threats to drive them out might be made every now and again, but he had no real intention of fulfilling them. The European trade brought revenue from which everyone benefited—everyone who mattered, that was. There were many vested interests involved. Bankers, merchants, local customs officials, provincial governors, the *nawab's* ministers and courtiers, the *nawab* himself. The list only excluded the ordinary people of Bengal. To drive the Europeans out would hurt a wide and powerful section of society. The *nawab's* inclination when his temper had cooled was to follow a well-tried precedent and make a show of force.

From his courtiers, Siraj-ud-daula had received two kinds of advice. One faction advised the *nawab* to leave the English alone, as they were 'flames of fire'. The other suggested a mixture of firmness and diplomacy, reinforced by a display of strength. The members of this faction were Kwaja Wajid, Rai Durlahb, and Mir Jafar, who appears to have been reinstated in favour. The *nawab* chose to take their advice, which was in accordance with his own inclinations. It was only proper that one of this faction should handle the diplomatic offensive, and the choice, for several good reasons, fell on Kwaja Wajid.

Kwaja Wajid was an Armenian, one of a number who were in India at this time. He was a merchant and banker, and had profited to some extent by the decline in influence at court of the house of Jagat Seth. Like most of the principal merchants in Bengal, Kwaja

Wajid had done business with the Europeans, and particularly with the English. The choice of a man who could speak to the English in the language of commerce was a shrewd one.

On May 28, the *nawab* wrote to Kwaja Wajid, who was at Hugli: 'It has been my design to level the English fortifications raised within my jurisdiction on account of their great strength. As I have nothing at present to divert me from the execution of that resolution I am determined to make use of this opportunity; for which reason I am returning from Rajmahal and shall use the utmost expedition in my march that I may arrive before Calcutta as soon as possible. . . . Should any person plead ever so strongly on their behalf it will avail them nothing. . . . Enclosed you will receive *permannahs* [official grants] for the French, Dutch, and Danes, in which I have assured them of my favour. I request you will deliver them, and see they are well used in their trade and other respects. Endeavour to engage those nations to prevent the English resettling themselves after I have drove them out.' At the foot of the letter the *nawab* added in his own hand: 'I swear by the Great God and the prophets that unless the English consent to fill up their ditch, rase their fortifications, and trade upon the same terms they did in the time of [Murshid Kuli Khan], I will totally expel them from the country.'

At the same time, Siraj-ud-daula ordered two of his commanders to make a small show of force at the Company's factory at Kasimbazar. William Watts reported to Calcutta that they were 'very troublesome in preventing provisions and other necessaries being brought into the factory. We are informed orders are gone to Dacca and all the *aurungs* [factories], to stop the Honourable Company's business.'

On June 1, the *nawab* wrote again to Kwaja Wajid, outlining the reasons for his actions. 'I have three substantial motives for extirpating the English out of my country, one that they have built strong fortifications and dug a large ditch in the king's dominions contrary to the established laws of the country; the second is that they have abused the privilege of their *dustucks* [duty-free permits] by granting them to such as were in no ways entitled to them, from which practice the king has suffered greatly in the revenue of his customs; the third motive is that they give protection to such of the king's subjects as have by their behaviour in the employs they were entrusted with made themselves liable to be called to an account.' Again the *nawab* added a note in his own hand: 'If they [the English] are willing to comply . . . they may remain.'

Unfortunately, Kwaja Wajid was not being well received by Governor Drake. The banker went four times to Calcutta in order to negotiate, but in spite of his high standing and reputation he was 'threatened to be ill-used if he came again on the same errand'. Kwaja Wajid's attempts to persuade the English to settle their differences with the *nawab* were supported by a number of Indian merchants in Calcutta who must have felt that their livelihood was being threatened. Among them was Omichand.

While his new emissary was being humiliated at Calcutta, Siraj-ud-daula was proceeding with his plan of hitting the English where it hurt—by interrupting their trade in the traditional manner, by blockading their factories and preventing their ships from moving up and down river. Rai Durlabh and another officer, Omar Beg, were ordered to surround the factory at Kasimbazar with troops. The *nawab* himself remained at Rajmahal, about three days' march from Murshidabad. Down river at Hugli, orders were given to detain English trading craft, and below Calcutta preparations were made to prevent English ships from leaving Bengal.

At Kasimbazar a train of artillery had been added to the troops surrounding the factory. Men who had earlier been sent to the Dutch and French settlements—probably because their commander hoped to squeeze the other Europeans as well—were withdrawn, perhaps because it was known that the *nawab* was now on the way from Rajmahal. On June 2, Watts, who had till then believed that all the *nawab* intended was the usual limited show of force, wrote to Calcutta to say that he expected to be attacked. He asked the Council immediately to 'send us a party of at least a hundred men as privately as possible by way of Krishnager river and march over land from thence'.

Within two days the situation had become much more serious and Watts asked that the Council should either send up 'a body of men that we may be able to defend ourselves, or write to the nabob that you will immediately comply with his demand' to dismantle the fortifications at Calcutta. The Council at Calcutta had no intention of doing anything of the kind. The fortifications, if such they could be called, were to remain. As for the reinforcements asked for by Mr. Watts, they were needed at Calcutta to protect His Honour the Governor and the Honourable members of Council.

The gentlemen at Calcutta salved their consciences with the report of an officer who had recently left Kasimbazar and swore that the fort was capable of holding out against attack.

In reality, Watts's state was perilous. With fifty men and a few antiquated guns, he knew that resistance was futile. Though he was only thirty-eight years of age, he had been in the country for twenty years, and all his experience told him that the affair could, in any case, still be settled without recourse to arms. Negotiation and a compromise seemed the best solution from every point of view, including the personal one—for his wife was with him, and pregnant.

Siraj-ud-daula had arrived back at Murshidabad on June 1 and ordered Rai Durlabh to take the fort of Kasimbazar. Rai Durlabh sent a message to Watts, asking for a meeting and assuring him of safe conduct. On the strength of this, Watts decided to meet Rai Durlabh and Siraj-ud-daula, who was now in his commander's camp. When he entered the camp, Watts was received politely, but as he approached the *namab*'s quarters he was seized and his hands were tied behind his back. In this condition he was hustled into the presence. Watts himself, however, never complained about this treatment, and it seems most likely that his hands were bound only with a handkerchief as a symbolic gesture of submission.

The *namab* demanded that Watts sign an agreement to demolish the fortifications at Calcutta, to reimburse him for loss of revenue caused by the abuse of duty-free privileges, and to refrain from giving protection to the *namab*'s subjects. Watts had no option but to sign, although he insisted that he had no authority to agree to the demands. Two members of his council were brought to the camp; they too explained that they were in no position to commit the authorities at Calcutta. That evening, one of them was sent back to the fort with orders from the *namab* that the garrison should surrender its arms.

The Kasimbazar factory was now occupied by the *namab*'s troops, who seem to have indulged in a little private looting, 'threatening the gentlemen to cut off their ears, slit their noses, and *chabuk* [whip] them'. But the warehouses and other Company properties were quickly sealed by the *namab*'s officials to prevent any real plundering. On the whole, the merchants were treated with politeness. One of them, Lieutenant Elliot, the commander of the fort, committed suicide—apparently because he disagreed with Watts's decision not to fight the *namab*'s army (which numbered about thirty thousand men at the time).

Watts was later criticized for not holding out in order to delay the *namab* at Kasimbazar until the monsoon arrived, when the rains would have made it difficult for the army to move on to Calcutta.

This criticism took no account of the sorry state of the Kasimbazar defences, or of the fact that Siraj-ud-daula's actions did not at the time suggest any wider purpose than an attempt to use Watts to put pressure on the British in Calcutta. Watts, in any case, did not consider he had the authority to be responsible for starting what might be a real war between the British and the *namab*.

After Lieutenant Elliot's suicide, the other Englishmen were locked in their rooms, although two contrived to escape. Mrs. Watts was unmolested and was later allowed to leave for the French settlement where she was well treated by the chief, Jean Law.

Watts and the second of the English merchants, Collet, remained in the *namab*'s camp, prisoners in effect but treated in the most polite fashion. According to Jean Law, the *namab* was in excellent humour, 'as surprised as pleased at the ease with which he made an end to the English at Kasimbazar'. Nevertheless, both Watts and Collet were sure that the *namab* would prefer to come to an accommodation with the English over Calcutta. Their belief was reinforced when Rai Durlabh told them that the whole affair could be settled by a payment of Rs 10,000,000. Watts replied that the Company could not afford such a large sum, and Rai Durlabh came down to Rs 2,000,000. When Watts insisted that even that was probably too much, Rai Durlabh invited him to make an offer. Without instructions from Calcutta, Watts could of course do no such thing, but Rai Durlabh—who was perhaps acting on his own initiative—refused to allow him to communicate with Governor Drake unless 'proposals for accommodation were made first from Calcutta'. Watts later maintained that he had managed to send details of his conversations secretly to Calcutta through the Dutch agent but that 'after the disgrace the Company had suffered at Kasimbazar' Drake was 'resolved not to come to any agreement'.

In fact, the *namab* was trying to negotiate with Governor Drake. As an added incentive towards peaceful settlement, he and his forces—which now numbered around fifty thousand cavalry and infantry, as well as a train of artillery commanded by a French mercenary, the Marquis de St. Jacques—began to march from Kasimbazar in the direction of Calcutta. With them went Watts and Collet.

In Calcutta, Kwaja Wajid was still endeavouring, in spite of his humiliating treatment by Governor Drake, to carry out his master's orders. On the evening of June 7 his confidential agent, Siva Babu, took to Governor Drake the letters the *namab* had written Kwaja

Wajid outlining his demands and promising to leave the English alone if they complied with them. Siva Babu returned to Calcutta a number of times but was just as often rebuffed as his master had been, especially since the news of the fall of Kasimbazar reached Drake on the same day as Siva Babu first visited him. Drake and the rest of the merchants at Calcutta were sure that it was the *namab*'s intention to attack Calcutta, and Drake of course had convinced himself that a showdown with the *namab* was the best thing that could happen. As early as June 3, he had decided that 'no solicitations by his ministers, letters from us, or any gift we could offer would pacify his extreme anger against us'.

Drake and the others in authority at Calcutta simply did not believe that the *namab*'s desire to negotiate might be genuine. Furthermore, they thought there were conspiracies afoot which included the Indian merchants. Omichand, whom no one seemed to trust, was certainly involved in the attempts at negotiation. Rumours were proliferating. The reports of spies were, as always, conflicting. It is not improbable that the English believed the French to be behind it all, in league with the Indian merchants to achieve the downfall of the British. In fact, they could be forgiven for believing anything in the atmosphere of the times. Bengal was a palimpsest of conspiracies. Every layer of activity was an intrigue of some sort, and it would have taken wiser men than the English to decide which was real and which was not.

The real clue to Drake's attitude, however, can be found in his firm belief that the English in Calcutta could hold off any attack by the *namab* at least for long enough for reinforcements to arrive from Madras. After this, he thought, Kasimbazar could be recovered and the *namab* put in his place.

Drake's contempt for Siraj-ud-daula's military prowess was shared by the other Europeans. The French and Dutch had been asked to assist the *namab* in his show of force against Calcutta by allowing him to use their ships to blockade the river. In return, the Dutch were offered a factory at Calcutta while the French—at least according to Jean Law—were to have the whole of Calcutta for themselves. The *namab* also promised them the same favours as they had received in the Deccan from the *nizam*. The request was accompanied by the usual threats. 'If you refuse my friendship and the offers I make you, you will soon see me fall on you and cause you to experience the same treatment that I am preparing for others.' The Dutch responded by claiming that there were no Dutch ships in



Bengal at that time and that they were therefore unable to help the *namah*. The French, after considering both the bribe and the threat, informed Siraj-ud-daula that they could not adopt what was, in effect, a hostile attitude towards the English without instructions from their superiors in Pondicherry. The French were apprehensive over the *namah*'s probable response to their refusal, but when he heard of it he merely said that, as the French were not prepared to assist him, they should not assist the British either.

The real reason for the French unwillingness to help was that they were not convinced that, if it came to a battle, Siraj-ud-daula would be able to defeat the British. Though the *namah*'s forces were large, they were not very formidable. It was said that he had with him three hundred elephants and five hundred guns, but 'with the exception of the European artillery and its ammunition, the rest of this stuff is not very dangerous, at least to judge by some guns which we saw at the Dutch Gardens [north of Chandernagore] where a detachment of horsemen who conducted them stayed for two days, having wandered from their road and having been refused a passage through our settlement. We went to see them out of curiosity. Nothing is more pitiable than the way in which they are mounted and supplied. People say they have only clay bullets.'

Attempts were still being made by various parties to settle the dispute between the British and the *namah*, but the actions of Governor Drake were beginning to frighten off would-be intermediaries. Watts was still secretly in touch with Calcutta and was still advising caution. A last attempt was made by M. de St. Jacques, the French commander of the *namah*'s artillery. His letter was received in Calcutta on June 13, and Drake's reply was to invite the Frenchman to change sides. Drake, in fact, had openly committed himself to resisting the *namah*. On June 10, he too had made a show of force.

## Chapter VII

### THE FALL OF CALCUTTA

WHY DRAKE should have elected to make a show of force is not clear. It could hardly have been in the hope of frightening Siraj-ud-daula, for it was a particularly feeble affair. Fifteen soldiers were sent in a boat to Sukhsagar, half way to the town of Hugli, with instructions to make as much noise as possible. They carried out their orders so effectively that the *nawab*, anticipating an attack on Hugli, hastened to occupy that town with two thousand cavalry. Three ships were also sent to the *nawab*'s fort at Thana, near Calcutta, which commanded the narrowest part of the Hugli river. The ships landed a small party which entered the fort without opposition, spiked the guns, and threw them in the river. These acts, though hardly threatening, were highly provocative. It is possible that Drake hoped a token display of force might encourage the other Europeans to join him against the *nawab*, a possibility which was being explored at the time. The response, however, was not favourable. The Dutch, who were militarily even weaker than the British, could hardly have done much even if they had wanted to, and the Dutch agent replied to Drake's request by informing him that he had orders to stay out of matters which did not directly concern him. He offered, however, to mediate between the British and the *nawab*. The French offered the British refuge in their fort at Chandernagore. Whether this was a gratuitous insult or meant in all sincerity remains an open question, but Drake and his Council—already convinced that the French were supplying the *nawab* with gunpowder and other materials—took the offer as another example of French perfidy.

Drake's attempt to persuade the Dutch and the French to help was certainly worth making. The British had every reason to search for allies, as the chances of defending Calcutta were small. In spite of all the reports reaching the Company's merchants there, not much had been done to fortify the settlement since Robert Orme reported the state of Calcutta to the Madras Council in 1755. 'The river

Ganges,' he explained, 'forms a crescent between two points, the one called Perrin's Garden, the other Surman's Garden. The distance between these, measuring along the bank of the river, is about three miles and a half. In the deepest part of this crescent, about the middle between the two points, is situated Fort William, a building which many an old house in this country exceeds in its defences. It is situated a few paces from the riverside, on the banks of which runs a line of guns the whole length of the fort from north to south, and this is the only formidable part, as it is capable of annoying ships in the river. The ends of this line are joined to the two bastions of the fort nearest the river by a garden wall and a gate in each, which would resist one shot of a six-pounder but which would be forced by the second.'

'Opposite to the two bastions mentioned,' Orme continued, 'are two others inland to the eastward, but within thirty yards to the north and forty yards to the south the bastions are commanded by large houses. To the eastward inland, the top of the church commands the whole of both the northern and eastern ramparts. Northward and southward for the length of a mile, and to the eastward about a quarter of a mile, stand all the English houses, mostly separated from each other by large enclosures. Where the English habitations end to the northward commence those of the principal black merchants, which reach quite up to Perrin's Garden. To the southward down to Surman's Garden the houses, belonging to a lower class of the natives, are less conspicuous. Twelve years ago a ditch had been dug, beginning at Perrin's, and carried inland of the town in a crescent, with an intent to end at Surman's, but only four miles of it are finished.'

In 1756 the state of the defences had deteriorated, for the eastern and southern faces of the fort had been pierced with holes and doors, and a large warehouse had been built in such a position that it prevented such guns as there were from being used to provide flanking fire. The garrison should have numbered five hundred men, but in February 1756 there appear to have been only 260 European officers and men. The high death rate in eighteenth-century India and the reinforcements summoned to Madras during the war against the French in the south were responsible for this undermanning of the establishment at Fort William.

Its small size was not the greatest of the disadvantages suffered by the garrison at Calcutta. Most of the evidence supports the claim that its commander, Captain Minchin, was wholly incompetent. John



MATCHLOCKMEN IN THE SERVICE OF AN INDIAN PRINCE



THE MUGHAL EMPEROR, FARRUKSIYAR

Zephaniah Holwell, the Calcutta magistrate, wrote: 'Touching the military capacity of our commandant, I am a stranger. I can only say we are unhappy in him keeping it to himself, if he had any; as neither I, nor I believe anyone else, was witness to any part of this conduct that spoke or bore the appearance of his being the commanding military officer in the garrison.'

Neither Captain Minchin, nor anyone else, seems to have been much concerned over the possibility of ever having to defend Calcutta against a serious attack. Despite instructions from the Court of Directors in London that a sensible plan of fortification should be carried out, the works put in hand were never properly executed, partly because of the general incompetence of the military and engineer officers, and partly on grounds of expense. Nor was the sorry state of the fortifications the only weakness. Reserves of arms and ammunition were also inadequate. Captain Grant, the adjutant-general, afterwards deposed that there were 'no cartridges of any kind ready. The small quantity of grape in store had lain by so long that it was destroyed by worms; no shells fitted nor fuses prepared for small or great. The few that were thrown at the siege burst half-way. There were two iron mortars, one of 13 and the other of 10 inches, sent out about three years ago. The 10 mortar we had just finished the bed for it, but the 13-inch one lay by useless for want of one; tho' there was upwards of three hundred shells sent out for both, all that could be prepared was not above twenty, and such as was thrown of them burst, some after quitting the mortar, others half way. We had but a small quantity of powder, and the greatest part of that damp.' The astounding thing was that the state of guns and ammunition was not realized until the time came for them to be used.

Certain preparations had, however, been made as early as May 20, when a force of native matchlockmen was raised and the censorship of incoming and outgoing letters begun. But the British had prepared no plan for the defence of the city, and none was embarked on until June 7. On this date a council of war was set up, consisting of the civilian members of the administrative Council—which, besides Drake and Holwell, included Charles Manningham, William Frankland, Richard Pearkes, William Macket, Edward Eyre, and William Baillie—the settlement engineer, Charles O'Hara, and the military officers, Minchin, Clayton, Buchanan, Grant, Witherington, and Smith. Only then was it discovered how few were the men actually available to carry arms. Of the regular force, seventy European

soldiers were sick, twenty-five more were on duty in the other upcountry stations, and most of the remaining 180 were Portuguese.

As was the case with all the European settlements, Calcutta had a native quarter known unimaginatively as the Black Town and a European one called the White Town. The trading centre, or 'factory', was located in the White Town and was surrounded by a wall. This was 'the fort'. In Calcutta it was named after King William, in whose reign it had been established.

The state of the fortifications and the smallness of the garrison virtually dictated the steps to be taken. It was decided to abandon Black Town and concentrate on a line established round the European houses. Governor Drake, 'by beat of drum, caused all the inhabitants of Calcutta fit to bear arms to be assembled'. The next day, two companies of militia were enrolled—English, Portuguese, and Armenians—to a strength of 250 men. Unfortunately, they were entirely untrained. 'When we came to action,' Holwell later recorded, 'there was hardly any amongst the Armenian and Portuguese inhabitants, and but few among the European militia, who knew the right from the wrong end of their pieces [matchlocks].'

But despite their preparations, the British still did not really expect to have to defend themselves. 'Even to the very last day', no one thought 'that the nabob would ever venture to attack us or offer to force our lines'. And in the unlikely event of his doing so, the opinion was that he would be repulsed. The civilians were so sure of this, and so sure that they would be the ones to merit the credit for defeating him, that two of their number were appointed colonel and lieutenant-colonel—ranks superior to those held by the military officers of the establishment. Their ability, however, could hardly have been less than that of Captain Minchin, or of his second-in-command, Captain Clayton. Unfortunately, neither was it greater.

The British had no really hard news of the *namab*. Their spies sent in the most contradictory reports. Some claimed that the morale of the *namab*'s army was low, others that his soldiers were already counting the loot they would lay hands on when Calcutta fell. All, however, agreed that the local landowners had been ordered to cut off food supplies to Calcutta.

On June 11, Governor Drake mustered his forces which numbered all in all—including regulars, militia and volunteers—about 515 men. What was to be done with such a small garrison? The wise thing would have been to withdraw into the area of the fort itself and put it into a reasonable state of defence. This would have meant

demolishing the houses and other buildings which overlooked the walls, and was the course of action suggested by Captain Grant, but it was turned down partly because of the almost incredible optimism of some of the members of Council, but mainly because it would have entailed destroying private property which belonged to many of the most influential merchants. Instead, it was decided to defend three batteries erected on the roads leading to the fort. The garrison was therefore divided as follows. Ninety-eight men were sent to the eastern battery or courthouse, under the command of Clayton and Holwell; a further ninety-eight under Buchanan and Macket to the southern battery; sixty-eight men under Smith and Mapletoft (the settlement's chaplain) to the northern battery; and the remainder of militia and artillery to the fort, commanded by Minchin and one of the English merchants, Bellamy. Ensign Piccard, with twenty-five men, manned the redoubt at Perrin's, while three sloops—the *Prince George*, the *Fortune* and the *Chance*—were sent to cover the redoubt, and twenty artillerymen and volunteers formed a mobile reserve. The rest remained in the fort. The native inhabitants of Black Town were authorized to defend themselves as best they might. Sensibly, most of them left the town altogether.

The time of decision was at hand. Last attempts at mediation were taking place, although the British still clung to the belief that their preparations would most probably frighten the *namab* off. An effort was made to subvert Siraj-ud-daula's gunners who, being French and Portuguese, were Christians. Catholic priests tried to persuade them to leave their Muslim master and not to fight against their fellow-Christians, but they replied that they were constantly watched and unable to escape. The British also kept careful watch for spies of the *namab*'s and on June 13 the order went out to arrest anyone who appeared at all suspicious. On that day, a boat was seized and though its occupants denied 'they had any letters for any person' they were found, 'after receiving punishment', to have two letters addressed to Omichand from Raja Ram, 'the principal spy of the nabob'. These letters were written in dialect, and Drake, unable to understand them, was convinced that they contained 'treasonable communications'. Omichand was still regarded with some suspicion, which had been increased by an accusation, allegedly made by an agent of Kwaja Wajid, that he had encouraged the *namab* to march on Calcutta.

Without consulting his Council, Drake ordered Omichand's arrest. The merchant himself did not resist, but his brother-in-law



was captured only after a fight and one of his servants, 'an Indian of high caste, set fire to the house, and in order to save the women of the family from the dishonour of being exposed to strangers, entered their apartments and killed, it is said, thirteen of them with his own hand, after which he stabbed himself, but, contrary to his intentions, not mortally'. When the English occupied the house, they found it full of weapons—despite an order that had earlier been made for the surrender of all arms. This was taken as indisputable confirmation of Omichand's guilt. Another prisoner captured after a fight was Krishna Das.

The *namab's* army was now only a short distance from Calcutta and on June 16 the Englishwomen of White Town retired into the fort. So, too, did about two thousand Portuguese (in reality, Eurasian) men, women and children. The Black Town was now deserted by its inhabitants. Soon the sound of guns could be heard as the *namab's* artillery engaged the *Fortune* and the *Chance*, which were defending Perrin's redoubt. There, Ensign Piccard with his twenty-five men stood fast in face of six guns and four thousand men and, with the aid of a small reinforcement, finally drove the enemy off at half-past six in the evening. By midnight there was silence, for every man of Siraj-ud-daula's picket 'after eating his meal, had as usual betook himself to sleep; which Ensign Piccard, who had served on the coast of Coromandel, suspected from their silence, and crossing the rivulet at midnight with his party, seized and spiked the four pieces of cannon, beat up and drove all the troops out of the thicket, and returned without the loss of a man'. The enemy was believed to have lost about eighty dead.

The *namab's* force merely pulled out until it found a less well-defended point, and there were many of these since the Maratha Ditch, which was full of debris, was easy to cross in several places. There were said to be seven thousand professional looters in Siraj-ud-daula's train, and these men quickly found a way into the town. The *namab* himself is reported to have entered by way of a bridge made for him at Cow Cross Gate, where the defenders' hired native matchlock men deserted to him. Siraj-ud-daula established his headquarters in what had been Omichand's garden.

The English took many of the looters prisoner, but the reports they were induced to give of the size of the *namab's* army and of his intentions were confusing. The information supplied by spies was no more dependable. Nevertheless, the general consensus was that the *namab* intended to attack the fort seriously on June 18, an

auspicious day in the Muslim calendar as it corresponded with the nineteenth day of the fast of Ramadan.

Siraj-ud-daula had to find a way of getting his artillery across the ditch. He contemplated renewing the attack at Perrin's redoubt but this proved unnecessary, as Omichand's servant—he who had killed the women and then attempted suicide—had recovered from his wounds sufficiently to escape, with another of his master's servants and a letter from Omichand to the *namab*. This letter explained that the Maratha Ditch did not extend all the way round the town and that there was a way in which the servant would show him.

On the evening of June 16, the Council had finally decided to destroy the buildings overlooking the walls of the fort and these were set on fire. Not to be outdone, Siraj-ud-daula next day burned down part of the Black Town. Between them, the British and the *namab* produced a scene 'too horrible for language'. By the end of the day, many of the hired coolies and native matchlockmen had deserted the British who, deprived of manual labourers, felt themselves in a shocking situation. 'We had not a black fellow to draw or work a gun, not even to carry a cotton bale or sandbag on ye ramparts; and what work of that kind had been done was by the military and militia. This want of workmen at last and scarcity at ye beginning harass'd us prodigiously, and prevented our doing several works that would have been necessary.'

The next morning, June 18, brought proof of the *namab's* intentions. His men began to infiltrate the city, bypassing the batteries and occupying such houses as still remained after the fire and could be used as posts from which to shoot at the defenders. At about 8 a.m. a large body of Siraj-ud-daula's troops began to occupy the houses commanding the southern battery and to pour shot and ball into it. The British found that their own artillery was ineffectual when turned against the solid mortar of these houses. An hour later, the *namab's* troops made an attempt against the northern battery but the attack broke up in face of a hail of grapeshot. At about 11 a.m. the *namab's* force, with two cannon—one of them an eighteen-pound, by the size of the ball—turned its attention to the jail. The British continued to defend it until 2 p.m., when it was finally evacuated and occupied by the enemy.

The battle continued, but 'tho' our men from the tops and windows of the houses kept a constant fire on them as they advanced, and our cannon from the fort and our batteries played on every house they could see them in possession of, and endeavoured tho' with

little success to fling shell amongst them (which had they been properly fitted for service would have been of more use than our cannon), yet the superiority of their numbers under cover of the houses at all quarters made it impossible for our people to withstand such showers of small shot as they fired into the houses we had possession of'. Though virtually every inch was fought over, by five in the afternoon the *nawab's* forces had taken possession of 'the houses in all quarters of the town in multitudes, and by their superiority obliged most of the men to quit the houses they occupied'.

At about the same time the commander of the eastern battery, Captain Clayton, decided that the battery could no longer be held, and Holwell set off for the fort to 'represent the state of the battery and receive orders whether it should be withdrawn or maintained'. Holwell was told to 'withdraw it immediately and spike up the cannon we could not bring off'. Returning to the battery, Holwell found to his astonishment that the two eighteen-pounders and one of the six-pounders had already been spiked up and that the post was 'in such confusion as bars all description. There was nothing could have prevented their bringing off the cannon and making the most regular and soldier-like retreat, had we been commanded by an officer of resolution and judgment, but as it was, our retreat had more the appearance of a confused rout, bringing off only one field-piece and the cannon spiked with so little art that they were easily drilled and turned against us.' The inadequately spiked guns were later used to great effect against the British in the fort.

The evacuation of the eastern battery meant that a general retreat had to be made to the inner line of defence, to the great houses which surrounded the fort. The other batteries were therefore called in and Ensign Piccard and his men were taken off from Perrin's redoubt by boat. By nightfall, all outlying positions had been evacuated. The defenders' position was now critical. They had hoped to frighten Siraj-ud-daula with the vigour of their response, but instead had been forced to give up after only a few hours' fighting a line which they had hoped to hold, if necessary, for several days. To help defend their new line, the British occupied St. Anne's church, houses belonging to Mr. Eyre and Mr. Cruttenden, and the Company House. Two sea captains were placed in command of the guns in each bastion of the fort, and everyone else crowded into the fort itself. The remaining coolies wisely made off into the countryside.

In all this chaos, Governor Drake was still able to maintain his special brand of insanity. Despite all that was staring him in the face,

he still 'imagined from the number of men slain of the enemy, a terror might seize them, and that they would decamp'. These words were not said of him by an enemy, but by Drake himself six months later, after Calcutta had been recaptured by the British.

On the evening of June 18, conditions in the fort were chaotic. After a Council meeting which ended about 8.30 p.m., the European women were ordered on board the ships. The garrison itself was so fatigued and dispirited that it would have been impossible to rouse them 'even if ye enemy had been scaling ye walls. Three different times did ye drums beat to arms, but in vain, not a man could be got to stand to their arms, tho' we had frequent alarms of ye enemy preparing under our walls to scale them.' Fortunately, the drums suggested that the garrison was ready for action, and the enemy withdrew.

The European women were sent down to the ships, escorted by 'Colonel' Manningham and 'Lieutenant-Colonel' Frankland whose duty was to see them safely aboard. These two gentlemen, however, decided to remain on board the *Dodalay*, of which they were part owners, in preference to returning to the fort, although they maintained they were merely awaiting an escort to guard them on the way back.

At 1 a.m. on the morning of the 19th, an informal council was called by Drake. The military officers who attended reported that their men were no longer under control, and that many were drunk or defiant. They gave it as their opinion that it was impracticable to defend the fort with so small a garrison and such ill provision of stores. 'The artillery officers reported they had not enough powder and shot for three days; our bombs and grenades were of no use, the fuses being spoiled by the dampness of the climate owing to their being filled some years and never looked into afterwards.' It was therefore unanimously agreed that the fort should be evacuated and a retreat made to the ships. The timing of the retreat was a matter for disagreement, as some argued that it should take place immediately, under cover of night, while others thought it would be better deferred until the next day. There was disagreement, too, on the manner of conducting it so that there would be least 'confusion or tumult'. At last it was settled that the retreat should be postponed until the following night, the day being occupied with 'embarking the Portuguese women and our valuable effects, by which means we should avoid the disorder we dreaded'. Messrs Manningham and Frankland were ordered to come ashore, but did not see why they

should, and the council broke up unceremoniously when a cannon-ball erupted into the room.

Early the next morning, in immense confusion, the Portuguese women began to embark upon the ships. There was no plan and no organization. It was a case of every woman for herself. The boats were overloaded and several sank. 'Most of those who had crowded into them were drowned, and such as floated with the tide to the shore were either made prisoners or massacred; for the enemy had taken possession of all the houses and enclosures along the bank of the river from which stations they shot fire arrows into the ships and vessels in hope of burning them.' About 10 a.m. the garrison in the fort was astounded to see the little fleet of ships pull away down river, and at the same moment Governor Drake was informed that all reserves of gunpowder were damp and useless. Unfortunately, this information was overheard and led the Portuguese women to stampede to the remaining small boats. About two hundred of them, with their children, were drowned.

Meanwhile, Ensign Piccard and twenty men had reoccupied the Company House, which had been taken by the enemy. But the firing was so intense that it had to be evacuated once more. By mid-day, all the garrisons from the houses surrounding the fort had been withdrawn.

The enemy was reported to be about to cut off access to the river. Drake, in desperation, ordered that the gate leading to the water be closed and guns moved there to defend it—but no one paid him any attention. Captain Minchin and many of the chief merchants were already engaged in beating a retreat to the boats. Drake joined them.

After picking up the governor and the military commander, the ships pulled down river again. Some of those on board, who had been under the impression that a general retreat had been ordered, tried to get back to shore, but no boatman could be found willing to risk the trip under the guns of the *nawab's* army. Only one commander, Captain Nicholson of the *Hunter*, seriously considered making an attempt to rescue the garrison; he was prevented from doing so by the threat that his native seamen would jump overboard and desert. Most of the ships were, in fact, privately owned, and their captains were reluctant to take the risk of their being sunk or damaged. As night fell, those on board the ships could not see the fort for the smoke and flames sent up by the burning houses which surrounded it.

The situation now was obviously hopeless. The desertion of Drake and Minchin and the others left the defenders of the fort with only about 170 men, excluding the Portuguese and Armenians. A meeting was called and it was decided that Governor Drake and those other members of Council who had fled with him should be suspended from office. Though Richard Pearkes was the senior remaining member, Holwell was called upon to take command and was appointed governor and administrator of the Company's affairs. It was immediately decided to evacuate the fort by using the *Prince George*, still off Perrin's redoubt, and a native ship which had been captured at the beginning of the siege. Pearkes and three or four European volunteers were sent to make their way to the *Prince George* and instruct her captain to move the three miles down river which would bring her opposite the fort. Unfortunately, because of an error by the pilot, the ship went aground and had to be abandoned. Pearkes and the others escaped and sought refuge with the Dutch—who handed them over to the *namab*. It was an incident which, though perhaps understandable, was not to be forgotten by the English. The men were later set free, unharmed.

The mishap to the *Prince George* occurred out of sight of the defenders and Holwell, unaware of its fate, continued with his preparations to hold off the *namab* until the ship could arrive at a place convenient for the evacuation. He decided to concentrate his small force within the walls of the fort and made the rounds of the defenders, promising that three chests of treasure which still remained in the fort would be divided among the garrison if they could hold out long enough for the embarkation to be organized. 'Signals were thrown out from every part of the fort' in an urgent attempt to persuade the other ships, lying down river, to return, but 'there was never a single effort made to send a boat or vessel to bring off the garrison'.

Meanwhile, the enemy was again attacking in overwhelming numbers, and the garrison which still remained in the church was badly mauled, many being killed and wounded. Nevertheless, they 'got up a quantity of broadcloth in bales, with which we made traverses along the curtains and bastions; we fixed up likewise some bales of cotton against the parapets (which were very thin and of brickwork only) to resist the cannonballs, and did everything in our power to baffle their attempts'. Inspired by the prospect of retreat and, no doubt, by the promise of lavish reward, the garrison fought bravely. But by the evening their

waned. As usual, however, the enemy stopped attacking when it grew dark, although—as one of the garrison wrote—‘the night was not less dreadful on that account; the Company’s House, Mr. Cruttenden’s, Mr. Nixon’s, Dr. Knox’s, and the marine yard were now in flames, and exhibited a spectacle of unspeakable horror. We were surrounded on all sides by the nabob’s forces, which made a retreat by land impracticable’. During that night, too, the soldiers ceased to obey their officers and, breaking open the quarters of those ‘officers that had absconded, and taking from thence what wine and spirits they could lay their hands on . . . began to be mutinous and unruly’. A corporal and fifty-six soldiers, mostly Dutch mercenaries, deserted to the *nawab*.

Sunday, June 20 dawned, the fifth day since the crisis had begun and the third successive day of acute emotional and physical stress for the garrison. The *nawab*’s troops attacked with undiminished vigour but, though they were overwhelmingly superior in number, they were repulsed again and again. Nevertheless, the defenders were losing heavily and the ammunition was almost exhausted. By midday, according to Holwell, twenty-five had been killed ‘and seventy or more of our best men wounded and our train [artillerymen] killed, wounded and deserted to all but fourteen and not two hours’ ammunition left’.

It was decided to call for a truce. In the excitement of the siege, it appears that Omichand—still imprisoned in the fort—had been forgotten. When Holwell remembered that he was still there, he persuaded him to write a letter to Raja Manik Chand, one of Siraj-ud-daula’s intimates, to ask him to intercede on behalf of the British. About 2 p.m., a man was observed outside the fort, making signs for the defenders to stop firing. Holwell held a shouted conversation with him from the ramparts and was told that, if the British would stop fighting, some arrangement might be concluded. Holwell, taking this as the reply to Omichand’s letter and hoping to keep the enemy quiet until nightfall, when the garrison might be able to quit the fort and board the *Prince George*—he was still not aware that the ship had gone aground and been abandoned—ran up a flag of truce and told his men to rest.

Two hours later, a message was brought to him that ‘some of the enemy was advancing with a flag in his hand and called us . . . that we should have quarter if we surrendered’. Holwell went off to the south-east bastion, armed with a letter to Rai Durlabh, ‘the general of the forces’, suggesting a cessation of hostilities until the *nawab* could

be written to and 'his pleasure known'. This letter he threw over the ramparts. 'The letter was taken up by the person who advanced with the flag, who retired with it. Soon after multitudes of the enemy came out of their hiding-places round us and flocked under the walls; a short parley ensued. I demanded a truce to hostilities until the suba's [*namab's*] pleasure could be known. To which I was answered by one of his officers from below that the suba was there, and his pleasure was that we should have quarter. I was going to reply when at that instant Mr. William Baillie, standing near me, was slightly wounded by a musket-ball from the enemy on the side of the head, and word was brought to me that they were attempting to force the south-west barrier and were cutting at the eastern gate.' The *namab's* soldiers had, in fact, scaled the north-west bastion and killed the garrison, while the western gate of the fort had been opened by a Dutch sergeant named Hedleburgh, either in an attempt to escape or by arrangement with those of his fellow countrymen who had deserted the previous night.

The enemy now poured through the gate, and Holwell, 'thinking that further opposition would not only be fruitless, but might be attended with bad consequences to the garrison', joined with Captain Buchanan and delivered up his sword to a native officer who 'had scaled the walls and seemed to act with some authority'. The siege was over, and Calcutta had fallen. For the first time within living memory in Bengal, a fort defended by Europeans had been taken by assault.



## Chapter VIII

### PROFITS AND LOSSES

THE NAWAB, as he entered the fort in his palanquin, was still somewhat surprised at his success. He was in a particularly magnanimous mood, partly because he now felt that his position on the throne was assured. He 'admired the building, adding that the English must be fools to oblige him to drive them out of so fine a city' and ordered that Holwell, who had been put in irons, be released from them and that the rest of the prisoners be treated 'with humanity'. Holwell had three interviews with the *namab* that evening, and received assurances from him 'on the word of a soldier' that no harm would come to the prisoners.

Siraj-ud-daula was particularly bitter about Governor Drake, and had the Factory House, which he believed to be Drake's property, burned down. But afterwards, he left the fort and settled down in one of the European houses for the night. No attempt was made to detain the Armenians and Portuguese, who left the city, and several other Europeans simply walked out of the fort and escaped, some of them joining the ships down river. Holwell later maintained that he too could have escaped but that he was 'resolved to share their [the garrison's] fate, be what it should'. This may have been true but more probably was not. Clive certainly did not believe it, and remarked that 'nothing but the want of a boat prevented his escape and flight with the rest'. Undoubtedly, Holwell played a major role in the defence of the fort, but later he was determined to make it appear an heroic one. Much of what he says in his narrative of events cannot be believed, particularly in the case of the famous incident of the Black Hole.

After the capture of the fort, which had cost the *namab's* forces, according to one estimate, seven thousand dead, the troops—probably on instructions from their master—behaved with considerable restraint considering the amount of loot that must still have been left around. One Englishman did report that 'we were rifled of our watches, buttons, buckles, etcetera. The bales of broadcloth, chests

of coral, plate and treasure lying in the apartments of the gentlemen who resided in the factory were broken open', but otherwise there was comparative calm. It was a calm that was not to last. Some of the European soldiers had achieved a state of drunkenness and began to assault the natives, who complained to the *namab*. Siraj-ud-daula enquired whether there was a dungeon in which defaulters in the Company's service were normally confined, and was told that a part of the barracks had been converted into a cell. This place had the emotive name of 'the black hole'. It was in fact the usual name given officially by the British to any garrison lock-up normally used for confining drunken soldiers and was not abandoned by the army until 1868. It was suggested to the *namab* that it might be as well to lock all the prisoners up in this cell for the night, to avoid the risk of their escaping. The *nawab* agreed, and it is reasonable to assume that he did not know that the Black Hole was a room about eighteen feet long and fourteen wide, with only two airholes (barricaded with iron bars) opening into a low piazza.

The prisoners were collected together under an arched veranda to the south of the main gateway of the fort, and were soon ordered to enter the barracks. They were then forced by the guards into the Black Hole. Holwell, who is the principal source for all the accounts of what happened, asserted that 146 people were confined in the cell that night, and that in the morning, after hours of horror, only twenty-three came out.

There is no doubt that the incident took place. The number of survivors, too, seems to be near the truth. But a close examination of the number of people who *could* have been confined makes it appear much more likely that the actual count of those who went into the Black Hole was, at most, sixty-four.

Holwell had his own reasons for exaggerating the tragedy, among them the desire to make himself out a giant who shrugged off the effects of extraordinary suffering, a Hercules among men. According to his narrative, he not only survived three gruelling days of fighting in the almost intolerable heat of an Indian June, but lived through a night in the Black Hole (buried for most of the time under a mound of dead and dying), and then marched bravely the next day burdened with fetters and 'under the scorching beams of an intense hot sun'.

The authorities at the time, however, found it convenient to take Holwell's word—though the crime was not felt to be all that serious and was not, in fact, listed as one of the *namab*'s misdeeds until long after. But it came to be one of the great imperial myths, designed to

horrify later and perhaps more squeamish generations. It is probably the only episode in the history of the British connection with India which is still remembered by the majority of the British people. Macaulay, writing in 1840, visualized Siraj-ud-daula seated 'on the eve of the battle of Plassey, gloriously in his tent, haunted—as a Greek poet would have said—by the furies of those that cursed him with their last breath in the Black Hole'. It is highly unlikely that Siraj-ud-daula gave the matter a moment's thought.

After his release from the Black Hole, Holwell was taken before the *namah* and, with three other survivors, put into the custody of Mir Madan, one of the *namah*'s officers. The four prisoners were taken to Murshidabad.

Siraj-ud-daula bestowed on Calcutta the new name of Alinagar, ordered the erection of a mosque inside the fort, and then left the city on June 24 under the governorship of Raja Manik Chand, a man described by Ghulam Khan as 'presumptuous, arrogant, destitute of capacity and wholly without courage'. All the British who were left in Calcutta after Holwell's departure were ordered to leave the city or run the risk of having their noses and ears cut off.

The *namah* and his retinue moved slowly towards Murshidabad, the *namah* obviously elated by his victory over the English. The actual cash profit on the capture of Calcutta had, however, been small, only about Rs 40,000, and the *namah* was suddenly reminded of the other Europeans' unwillingness to help him when he had asked for aid against the English. On June 25, supremely confident, he appeared outside Hugli, surrounded the town, and sent messages to the French and Dutch to the effect that, if they did not immediately pay him large sums of money, he would tear down their flag and destroy their fortifications.

The French and Dutch, though they had hardly been pleased at a native power defeating the British and though they did all they could to help the survivors of the siege, were not above feeling a sense of satisfaction over the destruction of a major trading rival. Both expected to do very well out of their increased share in the commerce of the country. But presented with a demand for Rs 2,000,000 the Dutch were dumbfounded and threatened to close their trading establishment and leave the country. With the aid of Kwaja Wajid, however, an accommodation was arrived at and the Dutch agreed to pay Rs 450,000 instead. They borrowed it (at nine per cent interest) from the Jagat Seth. The French, after negotiations which almost ended in a fight, were let off with a payment of Rs 350,000 which,

as they had recently received a sum of money from France, they tendered in gold.

The British firmly believed that the smallness of the amount was proof of the fact that the French had assisted the *namab* against the British. 'It was understood,' said William Watts, 'that the favour shown them in comparison with the Dutch after the destruction of our settlements, when he affected to fine both nations for augmenting the works about their respective factories, was in consideration of their having secretly furnished artillery when he marched against Calcutta.' In any case, the *namab* refrained from destroying the fortifications at Chandernagore and Chinsurah. He did not think it was necessary—he had taken the fort at Calcutta and could just as easily deal with those of the French and Dutch. Nor had he any intention of driving the French and Dutch out of Bengal; in fact he had no desire to expel the English either.

On June 28, William Watts and Matthew Collet, who had been carried around with the *namab*'s army since their capture at Kasimbazar, were released and sent to the French at Chandernagore. With them they carried a letter from the *namab* addressed to Mr. Pigot, the East India Company's chief merchant at Madras, which began: 'Director Pigot, of high and great rank, and greatest of the merchants, may you be possessor of the *Patcha*'s [emperor's] favour.' The letter went on to explain the situation as it appeared to Siraj-ud-daula. 'It was not my intention,' he said, 'to remove the mercantile business of the Company belonging to you from out of Bengal, but Roger Drake, your *gomasta* [agent], was a very wicked and unruly man and began to give protection to persons who had accounts with the *Patcha* in the *koatey* [factory]. Notwithstanding all my admonitions, yet he did not desist from his shameless actions. Why should these people who come to transact the mercantile affairs of the Company be doers of such actions? However that shameless man has met with the desert of his actions and was expelled this *subah* [province]. I gave leave to Mr. Watts who is a helpless, poor and innocent man to go to you. As I esteem you to be a substantial person belonging to the Company, I have wrote these circumstances of his shameless and wicked proceedings.'

By this letter, the *namab* intended simply to indicate that his attack upon Calcutta had been provoked by Governor Drake and that the door was still open for negotiation and accommodation. He totally misjudged the attitude of the British in Madras.

After releasing Watts with the letter, Siraj-ud-daula continued on

his way to Murshidabad, where he arrived on July 11. Once there, he sent off a message to the emperor in Delhi, declaring his victory over the British as comparable only with the exploits of Tamerlane. He also saw Holwell and other prisoners, who had been well and respectfully treated by their jailers—though Holwell later alleged that they were in a wretched state and still in irons. Holwell told the *namab* that, 'notwithstanding my losses at Alinagar [Calcutta], I was still possessed of enough to pay a considerable sum of money for my freedom'. To this, he said, the *namab* replied: 'It may be; if he has anything left, let him keep it; his sufferings have been great; he shall have his liberty.' Certain of the *namab*'s officers had tried to put pressure on him to have Holwell and the others tortured to make them disclose the whereabouts of the treasure which was supposedly concealed in Calcutta, but this the *namab* would not permit.

Holwell and his companions were given refuge by the Dutch in Murshidabad and, towards the end of July, they were able to make their way to Hugli and then down river to join Governor Drake and those who had fled from the fort. The British were now at Fulta, after an unpleasant journey by water. When it had become obvious that the fort had surrendered to the *namab*, the little squadron of ships—the *Dodalay*, *Fame*, *Lively*, *Diligence*, *Anne*, *Fortune*, *London*, *Calcutta*, *Neptune*, *Hunter*, and four or five others—had moved down river a little way to Govindpur point, in the hope that some refugees might still arrive from the fort. On June 21, as no more arrived and as there seemed a likelihood of attack, the ships pulled further down and tried to pass the fort at Thana, but the *Neptune* and the *Calcutta* ran aground and were captured and looted. The rest of the fleet, which had returned to Govindpur, was now joined by the *Speedwell* and the *Bombay*, which had come up past Thana. Another attempt was made to pass the fort and this time it was successful. On June 24, the fleet reached Budge Budge (or Baj Baj) where it was joined by a galley, the *Success* from Madras. The *Diligence*, however, went aground this time and was lost.

The British now heard that the *namab* was fortifying Budge Budge and had given orders that no provisions were to be supplied to the ships. This was bad news, as they were very short of supplies, 'not having a week's sustenance in the fleet of either food, wood or water, every vessel being crowded with men, women and children, country-born Portuguese'. The British now put ashore all the fugitives who 'had no connection with the Europeans' and carried on down river. The fleet, with Governor Drake aboard the *Dodalay*, arrived at

Fulta on June 26. It was not until July 20 that they received supplies, from the Dutch who had a small settlement there and sent them provisions secretly. While they waited for these, the plight of the British was unenviable. 'The want of convenient shelter, as well as the dread of being surprised, obliged them all to sleep on board the vessels, which were so crowded that all lay promiscuously on the decks, without shelter from the rains of the season, and for some time without a change of raiment, for none had brought any store away, and these hardships, inconsiderable as they may seem, were grievous to persons of whom the greatest part had lived many years in the gentle ease of India. Sickness likewise increased their sufferings, for the lower part of Bengal between the two arms of the Ganges is the most unhealthy country in the world, and many died of a malignant fever which infected all the vessels.'

Why the British stayed at Fulta instead of proceeding down river and making for Madras has never been adequately explained. Holwell maintained that Drake was waiting until he could send an envoy to Madras to explain, in a favourable light, his action in abandoning Calcutta. Drake insisted, on the other hand, that the fugitives had no provisions for the journey—which was certainly true. Whatever the reason, Drake and such members of the Council as were with him decided to open negotiations with Siraj-ud-daula. They set about it first by writing to Watts and Collet, who were then at the French settlement of Chandernagore, enclosing copies of a letter to be translated and delivered to Raja Manik Chand, Rai Durlabh, Ghulam Husain Khan, Kwaja Wajid, the Jagat Seth, and anyone else with any influence at the *namab*'s court. Watts replied that he would neither forward the letters nor acknowledge the authority of Governor Drake. Watts and Collet also believed that, 'should the nabob think fit to permit the English to return and resettle . . . it would be not only with the loss of all their privileges but on such shameful terms that Englishmen we hope will never consent to'.

Watts and Collet themselves wrote to Madras enclosing a copy of Drake's letter and stating that in their opinion there was no hope of re-establishing the British at Calcutta except by 'military force which we hope your Honour . . . will be able to send sufficient to attack the *namab* in his metropolis'.

The refusal of Watts and Collet to accept the authority of Governor Drake and the members of Council who had fled with him forced the latter to consider their official positions. As there was no

longer any Fort William at Calcutta, they could hardly be the Governor and Council of it. They therefore assumed the title of 'The Agents for the Honourable Company's Affairs'.

The new Agents had still not been able to send one of their number to Madras to explain their recent actions. Of the first two envoys chosen, one died and the other (Captain Grant) was needed at Fulta. It was rumoured that either 'Colonel' Manningham or 'Lieutenant-Colonel' Frankland—the first to leave Calcutta—was to be sent, and on July 10 the junior officers and civilians made a protest. 'Honourable Sir—Understanding that Charles Manningham Esq. intends going to Madras in order to represent the unfortunate loss of Calcutta and the situation of the remaining part of the colony; as that gentleman and Mr. Frankland left the place before any retreat was agreed to and afterwards refused joining your councils when sent for, contrary to both their duty and honour, we are of the opinion that either of those gentlemen are most unfit to represent transactions, which (as they absented themselves) they must know very little of, and therefore request that neither they nor any member of Council may be permitted to abandon the remains of the colony and the Company's effects scattered throughout the country.' Drake promised not to send either of these men. But, on July 13, Manningham and one Lebeaume—a French officer who had left Chandernagore 'on a point of honour' and had joined the English in fighting the *nawab*—were selected to go to Madras to explain the fall of Calcutta, to ask for reinforcements, and above all to persuade the Madras Council not to inform the Directors in England of the loss of the settlement until it could also be announced that an expedition was on the way to recapture it. Mr. Manningham took the opportunity of blackmailing his fellow councillors into accepting a justification of his and Frankland's behaviour at Calcutta. As he would be the first of the survivors to reach Madras, the reputation of all of them rested in his hands. With official absolution now secured, Manningham and Lebeaume left aboard the *Syren*. They reached Vizagapatam on August 12, and Lebeaume left for Madras overland the next day, carrying a letter from Drake.

The letter called for the strongest military force to be sent to Bengal to 're-establish ourselves in these provinces, which we esteem of the most essential consequences to the East India Company and trade of India in general'.

The Madras Council had received its first news of the outbreak of war in Bengal on July 13 and, on the following day, had decided

to send Major Kilpatrick and two hundred soldiers to reinforce Calcutta. Kilpatrick and his men had left on the 21st—a month, in fact, after Calcutta had fallen. The Council at Madras was unaware of what was really going on in Bengal, and did not hear the news that the settlement had fallen on June 20 until August 16. Kilpatrick and his men arrived at Fulta on July 30 or 31.

At Fulta, too, Watts, Collet, Pearkes and Holwell arrived between the end of July and August 13. Holwell protested vigorously against the retention of authority by Drake and other members of Council but gained no support for his attitude. Ultimately, he was persuaded to attend their meetings and afterwards the quarrelling seems to have stopped. Governor Drake was in effect reinstated and was even greeted with a salute of guns when he dined on board one of the other ships.

In order to preserve the secrecy of their plans for retaking Calcutta, the Council formed a special committee consisting of Drake, Holwell, Watts and Kilpatrick. They held their first meeting aboard the schooner *Phoenix* on August 22. In an attempt to divert the *nawab's* attention, Kilpatrick had already sent a letter assuring him that the British bore him no malice and asking for supplies. On the advice of the ubiquitous Omichand, Kilpatrick also wrote to Manik Chand, Kwaja Wajid, Rai Durlabh and the Jagat Seth. The letter for the *nawab* was sent off to a young man who had remained behind at Kasimbazar, Warren Hastings, with instructions that he deliver it, but he did not do so, and of the other letters, Omichand delivered only one—that to Manik Chand—because it had begun to appear as if the letters might not be necessary. There were signs of a rebellion against Siraj-ud-daula.

Although, on August 31, there had been news that Manik Chand was preparing to occupy Budge Budge and send fire-boats down the river to burn the British ships at Fulta, the letter to him did produce an order permitting local bazaars to sell provisions to the fugitives.

On September 17, Warren Hastings informed the Council that war between Shaukat Jang and the *nawab* was sure to break out. While the *nawab* had been preoccupied with the English at Kasimbazar and Calcutta, his rival had not been idle. Indeed, he had obtained from the Mughal emperor a *firman* appointing him *nawab* of Bengal—that imprimatur of legitimacy which Siraj-ud-daula had not yet succeeded in acquiring. Though there is no evidence in support, it seems most likely that the *firman* was extracted through



the intervention of the Jagat Seth. Siraj-ud-daula apparently thought so, for he bitterly taxed the banker with not obtaining the *firman* for *him*, struck him across the face and, when he refused to raise a large sum to help pay for Siraj-ud-daula's expedition against Shaukat Jang, had him confined to his house.

Shaukat Jang was thought to have partisans at the *nawab's* court. Mir Jafar, despite being back in favour with Siraj-ud-daula, was reported to look on Shaukat Jang as 'the only recourse against the growing and daily cruelties of Siraj-ud-daula', and pledged himself that 'Shaukat Jang would be strongly and unanimously supported'. Shaukat Jang assembled an army of six thousand cavalry and fifteen thousand infantry and prepared to conquer Bengal. He boasted that, after he had done so, he would place a man of his own on the throne in Delhi and then retire to Kandahar and Khorassan. There, he said, 'I intend to take up my residence, as the climate of Bengal does not suit my state of health'. According to Ghulam Husain, who was at his court, Shaukat Jang's state of health was a result of drugs, and he was in fact mad. Certainly, his actions gave no indication of sanity. His first step towards realizing his grandiose ambitions entailed antagonizing his own generals, most of whom he dismissed with harsh words. One escaped to Murshidabad after Shaukat Jang had threatened to flog him and told Siraj-ud-daula of the threat to his throne. The *nawab* sent one of his court to Shaukat Jang's headquarters at Purnea, and Shaukat despatched the emissary back with the information that he proposed to assume the throne but that Siraj-ud-daula's life would be spared if he immediately retired to Dacca.

Towards the beginning of October, Siraj-ud-daula began to collect an army. But he, like his cousin, antagonized his generals and they refused to march until the Jagat Seth was set free. Siraj-ud-daula gave in, but the temper of his officers did not noticeably improve and, fearing assassination, the *nawab* summoned his governor at Patna to his aid. The campaign against Shaukat Jang did not last long. The two armies met near Rajmahal and Shaukat Jang was shot dead in a charge against a body of troops in whose midst he thought he saw his cousin. The *nawab* had, in fact, remained behind the army and—fearing that his officers might use the cover of the battle to murder him—had sent a number of men disguised as himself among the troops. The ruse caught Shaukat Jang instead.

With Shaukat Jang dead, his army quickly surrendered and the *nawab* returned jubilantly to Murshidabad, confirmed in his belief

that militarily he was invincible. For the moment at least, there was no one—openly—to oppose him.

As far as the Europeans were concerned, said Jean Law, Siraj-ud-daula had only the most extravagant contempt for them. 'A pair of slippers, said he, is all that is needed to govern them. Their number, according to him, could not in all Europe come up to more than ten or twelve thousand men. What fear, then, would he have of the English nation, which assuredly could not present to his mind more than a quarter of the whole? He was, therefore, very far from thinking that the English could entertain the idea of re-establishing themselves by force.' The *namab* expected the English to offer money in exchange for a return of their trading privileges, and because this was what he expected to happen he made no attempt to interfere with the survivors at Fulta.

At Fulta the British were still in a very uncomfortable situation, and their information about what was going on at the *namab*'s court was confused. After October 9 or 10 when their informant, Warren Hastings, was forced to leave Kasimbazar, they could learn no accurate details of the progress of events. On October 13, the Council once more wrote to Madras saying that they were again finding it difficult to acquire supplies and where were the reinforcements they had asked for? (Kilpatrick's men had, by that time, been considerably reduced by sickness.) Their reply came on the sloop *Kingfisher*, which arrived on October 23. Admiral Watson and Colonel Clive, they learned, were leaving Madras with a strong body of troops. Overjoyed at the news, the British hoisted a flag, had a copy of the Company's *firman* from the emperor translated into Persian, and bribed a local official at Hugli to affix the imperial seal to it.

The news which came from the direction of Murshidabad, however, was not so heartening. A letter arrived from Omichand on October 27 informing the Council of Shaukat Jang's defeat and death. Though the *namab* still seemed in a benevolent mood, his governor at Calcutta (Manik Chand) was not, for he had heard of the enthusiasm with which the British had greeted their recent news from Madras, though he did not know what precisely the news was. Suspicious, he collected troops at Budge Budge, and it looked as if an attack was imminent. Nothing, however, happened. This was primarily because Manik Chand did not intend anything to happen. His instructions were to open up negotiations or at least to keep the atmosphere reasonably favourable for them. There was always the

possibility, too, that he might himself make some money out of the situation as it stood.

In December, however, the atmosphere deteriorated. Marik Chand's spies found out why the English had hoisted their flag and generally given the impression that things were on the move. Marik Chand also heard that a fleet of ships with British soldiers aboard was approaching the entrance to the Hugli river.

## Chapter IX

### DECISIONS IN MADRAS

IT HAD taken difficult decisions in Madras before the fleet was despatched. When news of the loss of Kasimbazar arrived, it had been decided to send one ship, the *Bridgewater*, to Bengal with stores, money, and 150 men to reinforce those who had already survived under the command of Major Kilpatrick. The Madras Council thought that a small force would be sufficient to beat off any attack the *nawab* might make on Calcutta, and that Kasimbazar would be returned after the usual routine of negotiations. But after Mr. Pigot, on August 17, placed before his Council the letters which he had received on the previous day informing him of the incredible news of the fall of Calcutta, it became clear that there was no real alternative to a full-scale expedition which would unequivocally reinstate the Company's position in Bengal.

Though the British and French were not officially at war in the south, both sides seemed to be preparing for a renewal of hostilities. The British in Madras were, when news of the first signs of trouble came from Bengal, making preparations to respond to a request from the *nizam* of the Deccan, Salabat Jang, to send him British soldiers and artillery so that he might resist the demands of the local French commander, Bussy. Madras had decided to send four hundred men and a number of guns. Instead, they had been forced to despatch Kilpatrick's contingent to Bengal. Nevertheless, the decision to send men to the Deccan still stood when the Council first heard that Calcutta had fallen.

The dilemma of the Madras Council was now serious. It did not want to go back on the decision to send troops to the Deccan, but neither did it wish to leave Madras itself open to a possible French attack. There were rumours that a French fleet of nineteen ships of the line, with some three thousand troops aboard, had sailed from Brest for Pondicherry. Admiral Watson, commanding the naval forces at Madras, also warned the Council of the danger to his s if such a fleet should materialize. If the British

transport troops to Bengal, the ships themselves would be in a dangerous situation once they had disembarked their passengers. 'Is it not very probable,' he said, 'if the French squadron should arrive here [Madras], which you have reason to expect, that they having intelligence where I am gone to, will, under the presumption of the largest ships not being able to get higher [up the Hugli river] than Balasore road, come there in search of me? How then should I be able to defend His Majesty's ships without men? Would they not become an easy capture to the French and thereby contribute to the ruin of your affairs instead of being of any service?' It was Watson's opinion that only a small force should be sent to retake Calcutta, and that any large-scale expedition should be delayed until the end of September, when the rains would have stopped and the roads would once again be passable. Besides, he added, 'if the ships were to go now, one third of the men would fall sick before there would be an opportunity of their doing any service'.

The Council 'unanimously resolved that Admiral Watson be desired to send the fifty and twenty-gun ships down to Bengal, with about 240 military, with the intent to retake Calcutta only'. So far they were prepared to follow his advice, but it was decided that, if there was still no news that war had broken out in Europe by the time the expedition was ready, he should be asked to take the whole of his squadron to Bengal and also to transport the regiment and artillery commanded by Colonel Adlercron—a body of royal troops which had been sent out to assist the Company's own forces against the French. On September 19, two ships, the *Chesterfield* and the *Walpole*, arrived from England. They carried no news of an outbreak of war in Europe.

Two days later, the Council met to decide what should be done now that the rainy season was coming to an end. The members were faced by three problems. What was to be done if—after the expedition had left for Bengal and before, perhaps, it had had time to defeat the *nawab*—news arrived that war had broken out between Britain and France? What was to be done regarding control of the forces sent to Bengal, and who was to have the last word on their disposition—the Madras Council, or the old and now somewhat discredited Council of Fort William? Finally, who was to command the expedition? An officer of the Company, or of the Crown? After a great deal of discussion, the Council decided that if war was declared then the expedition would be recalled, even if matters had not been settled in Bengal. This decision made, it followed that the

Madras Council must have control over the expedition, otherwise the British in Bengal might try to keep it there instead of permitting it to return to Madras. Much the same argument applied in the case of the commander; a Company officer would be more likely to obey the Council than a King's officer—most of whom were notoriously contemptuous of civilian control.

Nevertheless, Colonel Adlercron's claim to the command had to be considered. So, too, had that of Richard Pigot, who was governor of Madras and whose authority would be less likely to meet with opposition from the Bengal Council than would that of others. Pigot, however, had no military experience and did not press his claim. There was also Stringer Lawrence, the Company's most experienced soldier. But Lawrence was a sick man. Finally, the Council offered the command to Adlercron.

Adlercron refused to give assurances about the return of troops to Madras. Even more important, perhaps, he would not guarantee to reserve for the Company a portion of any booty that might be taken. The Council thereupon offered the command to Robert Clive—who accepted with alacrity. It was decided that two of the Council's own members would accompany Clive.

Clive's appointment was viewed with great disfavour by Colonel Aldercron. Clive was a Company's officer, that is to say, an officer appointed by the Company to serve in the Company's own army. Aldercron was a King's officer, in charge of a regiment of British troops which had been lent to the Company by the British government. Holders of the King's commission were much inclined to despise Company officers as amateurs without any professional standing. It made not the slightest difference to Adlercron that Clive had recently, when in England, received his commission from the king, or that he had been a successful commander in India, and Adlercron even went so far as to refuse to allow his regiment to embark. 'Surely, gentlemen,' he wrote to the Council, 'you are not so unreasonable as to expect that I will send away any part of His Majesty's train [artillery] or regiment (who are so immediately under my direction) and to leave to you the nomination [of its commander].' He further demanded that the artillery and stores which had been loaded should now be unloaded, and refused to leave the stores on board for the use of the Company's forces.

Manningham finally reached Madras on September 29, having been delayed by adverse winds, and was able to argue the situation in Bengal at first-hand. After the matter had been once more discussed,

Admiral Watson was appointed to command the expedition by sea, and Clive by land. The Council decided that the two civilian deputies they had delegated to assist Clive would infringe the position of the Council of Fort William, and despite Clive's protest they were dropped. Clive was, however, given independent authority to act in military matters as he thought fit, and this was to cause much friction between him and the Council in Bengal.

Clive received his commission as commander-in-chief on October 11, and on the same day wrote to 'The Honourable Gentlemen of the Secret Committee, London' in the following terms:

Honble Gentlemen—from many hands you will hear of the capture of Calcutta by the Moors and the chain of misfortune and losses which have happened to the Company in particular and to the nation in general. Every breast here seems filled with greed, horror and resentment, indeed it is too sad a tale to unfold and I must beg leave to refer you to the general letters, consultations and committees which will give you a full account of this catastrophe.

Upon the melancholy occasion the Govr. and Council thought proper to summons me to this place; as soon as an expedition was resolv'd upon I offer'd my service which at last was accepted and I am now upon the point of embarking on board His Majesty's squadron with a fine body of Europeans full of spirit and resentment for the insults and barbarities inflicted on so many British subjects.

I flatter myself that this expedition will not end with the retaking of Calcutta only: and that the Company's estate in these parts will be settled in a better and more lasting condition than ever.

There is less reason to apprehend a check from the nabob's forces than from the nature of the climate and country. The news of a war may likewise interfere with the success of this expedition; however, should that happen, and hostilities be committed in India, I hope we shall be able to dispossess the French of Chandernagore and leave Calcutta in a state of defence.

I have a true sense of my duty to my country and the Company and I beg leave to assure you that nothing shall be wanting on my part to answer the ends of an undertaking on which so much depends. Success on this occasion will fill the measure of my joy; as it will fix me in the esteem of those to whom I have the honour to subscribe myself with great respect.

Their most obliged and humble servant

R. Clive

Clive obviously anticipated the difficulties of the coming campaign, as well as its opportunities, for he wrote to his father:

'This expedition, if attended with success, may enable me to do great things. It is by far the grandest of my undertakings. I go with great forces and great authority.'

Colonel Adlercron's refusal to permit his artillery to go to Bengal delayed the departure of the expedition as a party of the Company's own artillery had to be assembled and embarked with its stores and ammunition. By the time this was done the best time for sailing had passed and the north-east monsoon was blowing. No further delay could be allowed, however, in case news from Europe might arrive and stop the expedition from going at all. On October 13, Clive received his instructions. He was to assist the Council in Bengal with advice, prevent them from quarrelling, and 'pursue such measures as you shall judge most conducive to the Company's benefit'. Though it was still possible that war with France might break out, and though Clive knew it might be necessary for him to be recalled to the defence of Madras, he still hoped to be able to seize Chandernagore if hostilities with France gave him the opportunity.

Three days later the fleet sailed from Madras. It consisted of five of His Majesty's ships—Watson's flagship, the *Kent* of sixty-four guns; the *Cumberland*, commanded by Admiral Pocock, of seventy guns; the *Tyger*, sixty guns; the *Salisbury*, of fifty; and the *Bridge-water*, of twenty. There was also a fireship appropriately name the *Blaze*. These were to act as escort for the transports, which were three of the Company's warships, *Protector*, *Walpole*, and *Marlborough*, and three ketches. The ships carried provisions and water for six weeks. The troops embarked numbered 528 infantrymen, 109 artillerymen, 940 sepoys or native troops, and 160 lascars, a word then used to designate tent-pitchers, coolies, ammunition carriers, and camp followers in general. Colonel Adlercron had finally agreed, though with reluctance, to permit some of his men to serve as marines on board the fleet. These, amounting to three companies, were commanded by Captain Archibald Grant, with Captain Weller and Captain Eyre Coote.

The weather was very stormy and in the first twelve days the ships were blown as far south as Ceylon. Later, to the north, it was necessary because of the winds to beat across the Bay of Bengal to the coast of Tenasserim in present-day Burma before it was possible to make the mouth of the Hugli. The waves in the Bay were running high and the ships took a heavy beating. On the night of November 13 the *Salisbury* sprang a leak 'which kept all her pumps going to free her, and after making the signal of distress, the carpenters of the



*Kent* and other ships were sent on board, who found out the leak and in some measure stopped it, so that she was able to proceed on the voyage under an easy sail upon her foremast, as the leak was discovered to be in the wooden ends forwards'. Two of the other ships, the *Cumberland* and the *Marlborough*, were compelled to turn back to Madras, cutting Clive's force by 243 infantry and artillerymen and 430 sepoys.

It was not until December 5 that Watson anchored off the mouth of the Hugli. During the last weeks of the voyage the rations on board—intended for a six-week period—had been reduced so that each man received only half of his normal daily provisions and a two-thirds allowance of water. Scurvy had appeared, particularly amongst the sailors, and Watson's force as a whole was in a sorry state. Supplies of rice for the Indian soldiers had failed and 'there was nothing to serve out to them but beef and pork'—meats ritually untouchable by Hindus. 'Some did submit to this defilement, yet many preferred a languishing death by famine to life polluted beyond recovery.'

The mouth of the Hugli, uncharted in the middle of the eighteenth century and almost unknown to European pilots, was dangerous with shoals and it was December 8 before, with the spring tides, the fleet was actually able to enter the river.

The *Protector* arrived at Fulta ahead of the convoy, but Watson in the *Kent* reached there the same day and was soon joined by the *Tyger*, *Salisbury*, *Bridgewater* and *Walpole*. The *Walpole* carried despatches to the effect that a Select Secret Committee should be appointed to manage 'all matters regarding the Company's possessions, rights and privileges in these provinces'. The members of the committee were to be Drake, Watts, Becher and Manningham. As the latter was in Madras, Holwell was drafted as a substitute and Watson and Clive were asked to attend the meetings. Neither man had any intention of permitting his independent authority to be diminished. Conflict was being prepared for—and not only with the *nawab*.

## Chapter X

### WITH SWORD AND PEN

CALIVE'S FIRST tactics in Bengal were to talk of peace but to threaten war. By doing so he was carrying out the instructions of the Council at Madras, for he had brought with him a letter from Madras to the Council of Fort William in which it was made clear that the expense of fitting out an expedition had to result in profitable returns. 'The mere taking of Calcutta' would be at best an empty revenge, and the only acceptable purpose of the expedition was said to be the restoration of the Company's trading privileges as well as—of course—'ample reparations' for the losses the Company had sustained. If the *nawab*, after hearing of the expedition's arrival, should 'make offers tending to the acquiring to the Company the before mentioned advantages, rather than risk the success of a war, we think that sentiments of revenging injuries, although they were never more just, should give place to the necessity of sparing as far as possible the many bad consequences of war'. The letter, however, went on to say: 'We are of the opinion that the sword should go hand in hand with the pen.'

Although this letter might have seemed to suggest that the restoration of the Company's interests was the sum of the affair, it really disguised a variety of more complex sentiments. Possibly the letter was phrased in this way so as to make it difficult for the Court of Directors in London to blame the Madras Council for putting political ambitions before the Company's profit. Viewed from London, the East India Company was just a commercial undertaking trading under difficult terms. The whole bias of the Directors and of the holders of India stock was against adventurism. The Company's involvement in south Indian affairs was a result, not of choice in London, but of circumstances in India. But the men on the spot observed the activities of the French in India, saw how they manipulated Indian rulers, and above all noted the startling profits some of them made. Already, among the Company's servants, there were

a number who looked beyond the simple restoration, or even expansion, of the Company's trade.

It was, therefore, in an atmosphere of infinite possibilities that the first moves were made. Admiral Watson had been told that, if he thought it practicable, he was to seize the French possessions at Chandernagore whether war had been declared or not. The Select Committee was reminded of 'the great advantage which we think it will be to the military operations . . . to effect a junction with any powers in the provinces of Bengal that may be dissatisfied with the violences of the *namab*'s government, or that may have pretensions to the *namab*ship'. Force and intrigue were the best bases for a successful policy.

Immediately on his arrival at Fulta, Clive wrote a letter to Raja Manik Chand, the *namab*'s governor of Calcutta. 'Upon my arrival in these parts from Madras,' he said, 'I was informed that you had shown a great friendship and regard for the English Company, for which I write to return you thanks. I doubt not but as you have hitherto professed a desire to serve the Company, you will at this time, when their favours must require it, retain the same disposition in their favour.' Manik Chand's reply was courteous and peaceable. The raja informed Clive that he was sending a trusted agent to 'impart you some further particulars which I recommend to your attentive consideration'. Manik Chand's friendliness may have been a cover for preparations to attack the new English force, but it seems more probable that, under pressure from the Indian merchants in Calcutta who were suffering from the loss of trade, he had opened up secret negotiations with the English at Fulta even before the reinforcements arrived from Madras. In this, he would have been following his own inclination as well as that of Siraj-ud-daula. This, however, is only speculation, for what the raja's agent said to Clive is not known.

In all likelihood, the raja sent Clive a suggestion that a letter should be sent to the *namab* using himself as intermediary. A communication from Pigot had already been forwarded to Murshidabad through other channels, and others had gone to some of the *namab*'s provincial governors, calling upon them for assistance and containing, as well as a barely concealed threat, a recital of the British complaints against the *namab*.

Clive's letter to Siraj-ud-daula called for full satisfaction and reminded him that the force which Clive commanded was such as 'was never seen before in your province'. In his covering note to

Manik Chand, Clive warned the raja that 'it would be the *nabab's* own fault if the troubles of this country should begin again and be worse than ever'. Manik Chand responded by suggesting certain minor changes in the letter to the *nabab*. These were mainly concerned with forms of address; he said, for example, that it would be right to call the *nabab* 'sacred and godlike prince'. But the niceties of oriental protocol were not for Clive. 'I cannot,' he complained to the raja on Christmas day 1736, 'consistently with my duty to the Company or their honour, accept of your advice in writing to the nabob a letter couched in such a style, which, however proper it might have been before the taking of Calcutta, would but ill suit with the present time, when we are come to demand satisfaction for the injuries done us by the nabob, not to entreat his favour, and with a force which we think sufficient to vindicate our claims.' In the end, Clive's original draft was sent to Murshidabad by other hands. With it went a letter from Admiral Watson which was anything but submissive in tone. Neither were the next actions of the British.

On December 29 the fleet moved up river from Fulta. Clive's authority as commander was not accepted willingly by the King's officers, and at the council of war—consisting of all the senior military and naval officers—it was decided that the Company's troops should go by land while the ships would carry most of the artillery and the King's troops. It seems that the latter, rather than Clive and the Company's forces, were intended to take the fort of Budge Budge, which was the first objective.

Clive, with two field-pieces and about five hundred men, set out the day before the fleet. The going was heavy, for 'in order to prevent discovery' the native guides 'led the troops at a distance from the river, through a part of the country, which was uninhabited indeed, but full of swamps and continually intersected by deep rivulets, which rendered the draught and transportation of the [gun] carriages so tedious and laborious that the troops did not arrive until an hour after sunrise at the place of ambuscade'.

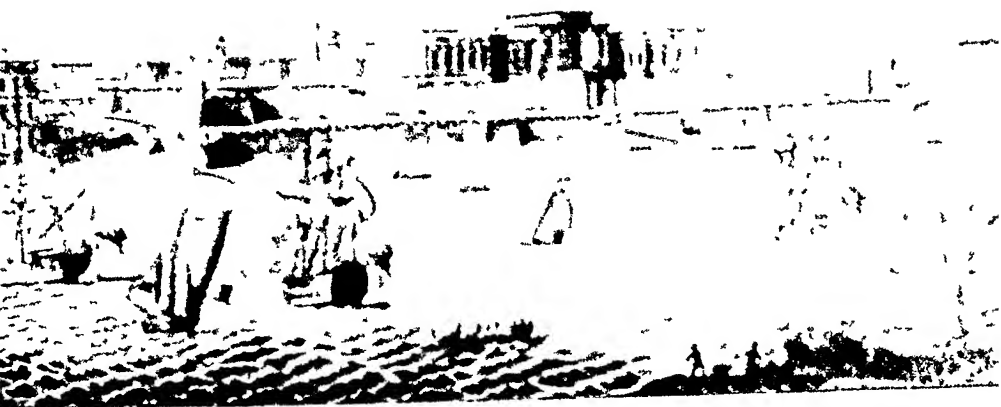
The position occupied by Clive and his men was surrounded with bushes and they could not see the fort at all. Clive had no trustworthy news of the enemy, and was unaware that a force under Manik Chand was camped only two miles away. After he had deployed his body of men Clive was left with a unit of 260 Europeans. He later gave an account of what followed on the morning of the 29th. 'At ten,' he said, 'Manik Chand attacked us with between two and three thousand horse and foot, and was worsted. The people of

the country raise fabulous reports about the killed and wounded; but there is reason to believe, from the smartness of the fire while it lasted, and the nearness of the enemy, some of which were within twenty yards, 150 might be killed and wounded and with them four of the principal *jemadars* [officers] and an elephant. Manik Chand himself received a shot in his turban. Our two field-pieces were of little or no service to us, having neither tubes nor port-fires, and wrong carriages sent with them from Fort St. David [Madras]; indeed, we still labour under every disadvantage in the world.'

This incident raises a number of questions. The first is, whether it took place at all. Manik Chand had undoubtedly evacuated the fort at Budge Budge and retired upon Calcutta, perhaps so as not to offend the English whom he certainly believed to have superior armament. Why should he have returned to attack Clive? The most probable answer is that the meeting was accidental. Clive's behaviour, too, at this his first engagement in Bengal, requires explanation. Orme, much later, suggested that Clive had panicked, and though there is no satisfactory evidence of this he may have been caught off balance after an extremely unpleasant march. Clive was easily depressed by adverse physical conditions. He was a hypochondriac and constantly worried about his health. He had moments of despair and lack of confidence. But he always rallied. Essentially, Clive was not a soldier and had little or no sense of professionalism even in relation to the low standard of most of the professional soldiers who surrounded him. He had made his reputation as, in effect, a guerrilla leader and had been remarkably successful. But such successes had not really made him a good commander. He had courage and panache, but it is a little difficult to take seriously a soldier who not only did not make sure that his artillery was in working order, but almost explicitly admitted it in an official despatch.

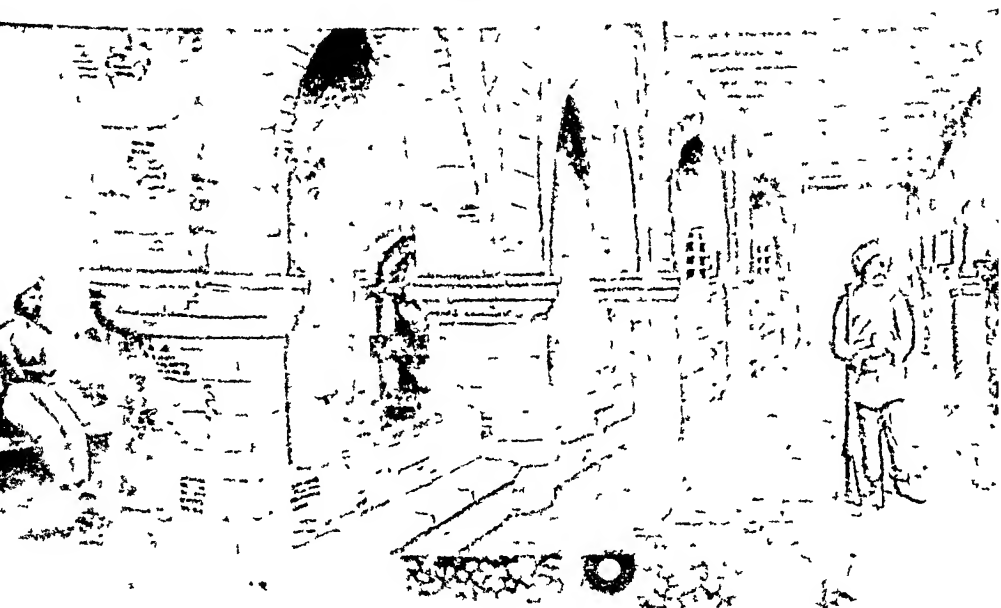
While the skirmish was in progress, the English ships had arrived before Budge Budge. The first shots were fired by the defenders, a fact which was to be used in justification of subsequent British actions. After the guns of the fort had been put out of action, marines were landed who, hearing that Clive had been attacked, left the assault on the fort and went to his aid.

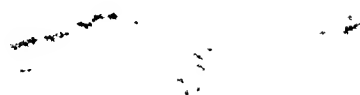
After the clash with Manik Chand, Clive went on board the flagship to consult with Watson. In view of Clive's fatigue it was decided that a full-scale attack on the fort should be postponed until the next morning. This greatly annoyed Captain Eyre Coote, the King's officer who was in command of the attack. He was even



FORT WILLIAM, CALCUTTA, 1754, FROM A CONTEMPORARY  
ENGRAVING

RECONSTRUCTION OF THE LOCK-UP KNOWN AS THE  
'BLACK HOLE'





more annoyed when 'one Strahan, a common sailor belonging to the *Kent*, having been just served with a quantity of grog (arrack mixed with water) had his spirits too much elated to think of taking any rest; he therefore strayed by himself towards the fort, and imperceptibly got under the walls; being advanced thus far without interruption, he took it into his head to scale at a breach that had been made by the cannon of the ships; and having luckily gotten upon the bastion, he there discovered several Moor-men sitting on the platform, at whom he flourished his cutlass, and fired his pistol, and then, after having given three loud huzzas, cried out, "the place is mine".' Strahan's comrades rushed to support him—and the fort was taken. The losses, four wounded. Coote recorded in his journal: 'Thus the place was taken without the least honour to anyone!' When Strahan was brought before the admiral he was severely rebuked and threatened with future punishment. 'If I am flogged for this here action,' Strahan is said to have muttered as he left the admiral's cabin, 'I will never take another fort by myself as long as I live, by God.'

On December 31 the fort was demolished and the troops re-embarked. The sepoys, however, continued their march by land. On January 1 the fleet anchored off Thana fort. A new mud fort had been erected on the opposite bank, but the British found that both had been abandoned. Inside, there were 'about 40 guns, some 24-pounders, and all mounted on good carriages, most of them the Company's'.

'In the night,' wrote Watson, 'I sent the boats manned and armed up the river, to set fire to a ship and some vessels that lay under a fort, which was executed without opposition. That was a necessary piece of service, as I heard they were filled with combustibles in order to be set on fire when the ebb made, to burn our ships.'

Next morning at 5 a.m. the Company's troops were landed and, being joined by the sepoys, set off for Calcutta. Watson moved up river with the *Kent* and the *Tyger* towards Fort William; a few rounds were fired at them from the shore, but as the ships approached the gun emplacements the artillerymen ran off. 'At 10 a.m., the ships coming abreast of Fort William were fired upon pretty wildly as they lay becalmed, sheering around in the eddies of the tide; but soon, after coming to an anchor close in with the western line of guns on the riverside, they drove the enemy from her batteries, who fled through the eastern gate before the military or sepoys could come up with them; in this action three of the King's soldiers and six sailors



were killed.' As the enemy departed, some of the inhabitants hoisted a British flag on a tree. The admiral then put ashore a naval officer, Captain King, and a detachment of troops under Eyre Coote, to take possession of the fort.

Coote's orders were to hold the fort and not to give it up to anyone. When the sepoys arrived, therefore, they were prevented from entering and Clive 'was informed that none of the Company's officers or troops should have entrance. This, I own, enraged me to such a degree that I was resolved to enter if possible, which I did.' When Clive demanded that Coote relinquish command of the fort to him, Coote pleaded orders and asked permission to inform the admiral. The admiral thereupon wrote Clive a threatening letter and also sent a verbal message to the effect that, if he did not quit the fort, he 'should be fired out'. Clive refused to be intimidated. He replied that 'he could not answer for the consequences, but that he would not give up his command'.

The affair was finally settled through an intermediary, Captain Latham. He and Clive 'talked the affair over with calmness, and soon settled a dispute which otherwise might have ended greatly to the prejudice of the public cause. The colonel's messages to Mr. Watson implied, that if the admiral would come on shore and command in person, he should have no manner of objection to it: And on Admiral Watson's going on shore, the next day, the colonel delivered the keys of the garrison into his hands, and then the admiral delivered them to the late governor, Mr. Drake, and his Council'.

Drake and the other members of the Select Committee disliked Clive because the authority given to him by the Madras Council implied—justifiably—a distrust of their own competence. After Calcutta had been recaptured, they complained to the Council at Madras: 'We cannot conceive by what authority you have assumed a right in giving that gentleman the powers you have done, and therein treating us in the light of a subordinate.' In Clive's opinion—and in this he was right—the Council of Fort William was interested only in extracting punitive compensation for their own personal losses, and took no great thought over the interests of the Company. Clive seems to have been shocked by this, or at least gave that impression in his letters. Unlike the others, he did have the affairs of the Company at heart, partly perhaps because he had not yet seen the chances of profit in Bengal. He hoped to make his name in a dramatic fashion, as far as the Directors of the Company in London were concerned, by restoring the Company's prosperity in Bengal. For this he

believed he might be awarded a high appointment. It was necessary for him to have the old trading privileges reinstated. If diplomacy would work, he was prepared to utilize it, but he wanted to inflict a real defeat on the *nawab*—not for the sake of personal glory but because he was convinced that, unless the *nawab* was shown that he must respect the Company's settlements, there would be a relapse into the old routine of threat and squeeze.

To Clive's larger ambitions as well as to his immediate tactics, Drake and his fellows were a menace. 'I would have you guard against everything these gentlemen can say,' he wrote to Pigot in Madras on January 7, 1757, 'for believe me they are bad subjects and rotten at heart, and will stick at nothing to prejudice you. . . . The riches of Peru and Mexico should not induce me to dwell among them.'

The Calcutta which the British had recaptured was almost completely in ruins. Much of the fort was severely damaged and many of the surrounding houses had been burned to the ground during the defence of the previous year. One of the defending walls, the eastern curtain, had been demolished in order to make way for the *nawab's* mosque. Such houses as survived had been gutted and the furniture, doors and window-frames used for firewood. The Black Town was in an even worse state. What the British had not burned there, the *nawab* had. Everything that had survived the fire had been plundered.

Nevertheless, after the miseries of Fulta the Europeans were more than happy to be back. Very soon the White Town was beginning to look reasonably prosperous, despite the fact that everyone was supposed to be so short of money that a request had to be made to the Court of Directors in London to suspend the laws against debtors.

While the work of reconstruction was going on, Clive and Watson were preparing the next step of the campaign against the *nawab*. It was decided that the town of Hugli—which, if used as a base by the *nawab's* forces, would directly threaten Calcutta—should be attacked and destroyed. According to Clive, it had been agreed in Madras that Hugli 'should fall a sacrifice' in payment for the ruin of Calcutta. On January 4, therefore, 170 of the King's troops, a company of grenadiers, and 300 sepoys, commanded by Major Kilpatrick, were embarked on the *Bridgewater*, *Kingfisher* and *Thunder*. Next day, unfortunately, the *Bridgewater* 'by not having a good pilot, stuck on a sandbank where he lay forty-eight hours in great danger, but got off without receiving much damage, and by the assistance of a

Dutch pilot . . . he proceeded agreeable to his orders'. The Dutch pilot had, in fact, been taken off his own ship by force as the Dutch refused their voluntary help.

On January 9, a body of troops was landed below the fort at Hugli and the ships began to bombard the town's defences. The fort was later occupied, the garrison—though it numbered about two thousand men—running away. From then until January 18 the troops spent their time looting native houses. On the 12th, Eyre Coote was sent with fifty soldiers and a hundred sepoy to burn a granary up river. With him went sailors in boats from the men-of-war, whose task it was to search the creeks for enemy ships. Coote burned the granary but encountered a party of the enemy on his way back and had to fight over a mile to the river. On the 19th, after destroying the fortifications at Hugli, the troops were re-embarked and returned to Calcutta. The sepoy, however, were left behind. It had been decided also to send a force against the town of Dacca, for, as Clive wrote, 'the surprise of this place may be of great consequence to the Company's affairs'. The expedition was abandoned when news came that the *nawab* had assembled a large army which had arrived at a place slightly up river from Hugli on the same day as the European troops had been withdrawn to Calcutta.

Clive, at Fort William, had been attempting to put the defences into some kind of order, but, he wrote, he 'could not make it more than barely tenable for, to all its former defects when taken from us, the Moors have broken down part of the curtain'. Nevertheless, he still felt able to report that 'Fort William can never be taken by the Moors except by cowardice', which may have been intended as a reminder to Governor Drake and his colleagues that even good fortifications needed good men to hold them.

Whatever the state of Fort William, Clive was determined to prevent a direct attack on it. This was not because he feared the *nawab's* army but because he had doubts about the French. At the time of the attack on Hugli, the news had at last arrived that war had broken out between France and Britain in May 1756. It was conceivable, therefore, that the French in Bengal might support the *nawab*. They had at Chandernagore some three hundred Europeans and a train of artillery which, in conjunction with the sheer weight of numbers of the *nawab's* army, would provide formidable opposition to Clive's tiny force.

Clive and Stringer Lawrence (the founder of the Indian army) had discovered in the south that well-trained native troops, as long as

they were commanded by British officers, could defeat the irregular cavalry and foot-soldiers of the native rulers. Clive decided to increase his force in Bengal on the same principle. From among the mercenaries of many races and religions who had followed the Muslim conquerors into Bengal he recruited two or three hundred men and formed them into the First Regiment of the Bengal Native Infantry.

Even with these new enlistments, Clive's force was still inadequate. He therefore wrote to Admiral Watson in the most punctilious terms. 'You are very sensible, sir, that with sickness and other accidents how far this force falls short of what was intended to act offensively against the nabob of Bengal; indeed at present nothing but our strong situation can enable us to act against him at all. I must therefore request a favour of you, sir, to land the King's forces and to lay your commands on the officer who commands them to put himself under my orders; assuring you at the same time that whenever you think it for the good of the service to recall them, upon signification thereof to me by letter, they shall be returned.' Admiral Watson's reply was equally correct: 'I have received your favour of yesterday's date, enclosing the return of your little army and desiring the King's forces may be sent to join you. I cannot help thinking the number of your own troops are too few even to act defensively against the nabob, therefore I have given orders to the captains of the several ships to discharge their troops, and have directed Captain Weller to join you, and put himself under your command until further order.' Clive was pleased, but he still felt that, as far as the King's troops were concerned, 'it had been better for the service they had never come and I had the like number of Company's in their room'.

Though relations between Clive and Watson now seemed reasonably cordial, the same could not be said for those between Clive and the Select Committee. The Committee coolly informed Clive that he was to give up his independent powers and place himself under *their* control and carry out *their* plans. Nor were he and his troops to leave Bengal without the Committee's permission. Clive replied that, as long as his orders coincided with theirs, there would be no difficulties. The Committee wanted a quick defeat of the *nawab* and the repayment of their personal losses from his treasury. Clive, however, was willing to dispense with defeating the *nawab* if he could achieve his ends—which were to expand and consolidate the *Company's* affairs—by arriving at a treaty. With the tiny forces

at his disposal, he considered that, for the moment anyway, intrigue was better than war.

While the attack on Hugli was actually in progress, Clive was in touch with a number of potential mediators. To Manik Chand, Kwaja Wajid and the Jagat Seth he suggested that they might bring pressure to bear upon the *nawab*. The English, he said, would 'not rest satisfied with the bare walls of Calcutta'. The *nawab* apparently pressured the Jagat Seth into replying to Clive, that if he expected to come to an agreement with the *nawab*, he must stop his military activity. 'How can you expect,' ran the reply, that 'the *nawab* will pass or overlook your conduct in pretending to take up arms against the prince of that country?' Kwaja Wajid, when he replied, suggested that Renault, the French chief at Chandernagore, should be asked to mediate.

On January 21, four days after this letter was sent, two Frenchmen arrived in Calcutta. They had been sent by M. Renault and explained that, although they were not empowered to act on behalf of the *nawab*, they were prepared to convey any proposals the Select Committee cared to make. The Frenchmen were informed that such proposals had been sent to Kwaja Wajid that very day, but were also told, verbally, that the proposals covered four points:

(a) The British should receive complete reparation for all their losses.

(b) The Company should be allowed full exercise of all its privileges in Bengal.

(c) The British should have the right to fortify all their settlements as they pleased.

(d) The Company should have a mint at Calcutta.

The two Frenchmen departed to consult with Kwaja Wajid and returned a few days later with a message from him to the effect that it was his opinion that the *nawab* might be expected to grant the first three proposals but that he had no power to grant permission to coin money. The British stood firm, and the Frenchmen finally returned to Chandernagore.

Clive was now in the position of having to rethink some of his strategy. He was faced with the possibility of being recalled to Madras to protect the settlements on the Coromandel coast. Even if he were not ordered to return, he could expect no reinforcements. The *nawab* was approaching Calcutta with a large force and there might be another attack on the still inadequately fortified settlement.

In view of the war in Europe, however, Clive was not prepared to consider the French as mediators. Admiral Watson seems to have had no objection to the French but was strongly opposed to the Dutch, who had volunteered their good offices on January 22. Both offers had, in fact, been made at the instigation of the *nawab* himself.

Siraj-ud-daula next wrote to Admiral Watson. Once again he accused Drake of being responsible for the conflict between himself and the Company and said that if a new chief were appointed everything could return to normal. The *nawab* was obviously not yet really frightened of the British. In effect, he shrugged his shoulders at the prospect of renewed hostilities: 'If you imagine that by carrying on a war against me you can establish your trade in the dominions you may do as you think fit.'

Emissaries continued to pass between Siraj-ud-daula and the British. The *nawab* was agreeable to compensating the merchants, but not for all their losses. Would Clive send 'a person of trust and confidence' with proposals? There was a gift of flowers and fruit for Clive. In response, the English commander wrote to say that he would send two envoys, Walsh and Luke Scrafton, to the *nawab*.

While these pleasantries were being exchanged, the *nawab* was moving slowly closer to Calcutta. On January 30, he wrote to Renault asking for French aid in punishing 'this faithless people' and chasing them from the country. He promised Renault that in return he would 'abolish for ever the annual imposts on your commerce and I give you the right to establish a mint at Chandernagore. I will demand a *firman* for this from the Light of the Presence, the greatest and purest, the emperor of Delhi, and will send it to you. Until the arrival of the *firman* I will give you a *parwana*, with my seal, so that you may exercise these two privileges with perfect tranquillity of mind.'

The French refused the *nawab*'s offer, but not for the same reasons as they had refused before the first attack on Calcutta. In the interim, the *nawab* had squeezed them and they had had to pay up. Now things were rather different. It even looked as if the British might give the *nawab* a beating. The French were in fact anxious to reach an accommodation with the British, whom they and the Dutch, at risk of offending Siraj-ud-daula, had secretly helped during their troubles. The French thought that, in return, they might at least expect a mutual non-aggression pact. Their hatred of the *nawab* was deep and corrosive—and contrary to their best interests. If the

British defeated him and perhaps placed someone else on the throne, the days of the French Company in Bengal would be numbered. But they did not consider this; nor was the war in Europe more than a secondary matter to them.

The French dilemma was acute. They could not openly support the British in case the *namab* turned against them. They could not support the *namab*, because they hated him, and because the British, if they were victorious, might afterwards turn upon the French. As they had no treaty of neutrality with the British, the British might turn upon them anyway. The French decided to sit tight, mediate if asked, support neither side, and hope for the best. The Council of Fort William, in fact, hoped that the French *would* remain neutral, although Watson would have been prepared to enter into a temporary alliance with them against the *namab*.

On February 2, Clive's envoys were given their instructions and told to convey to the *namab* three other demands in addition to the four already sent through Kwaja Wajid. These required the *namab* not to 'molest any of the merchants or inhabitants of Calcutta', to protect ships and goods carrying British *dustucks*, and agree to the terms under the seals and signatures of himself and his ministers.

Though Siraj-ud-daula had promised that he would await the British envoys at Nawabganj, some twenty miles from Calcutta, he failed to do so. Indeed, on the morning of February 3, his advance guard entered Calcutta. A small British force under Lebeaume was despatched to drive them out, and at about 5 p.m. Clive sent a large body which 'advanced towards the enemy to discover their situation and whether they were making any lodgement [camp] that could disturb us; whereupon a cannonading ensued which was soon discontinued as night came on, when both parties returned to their respective camps'.

The same evening, Clive received another letter from the *namab*, explaining that his troops had entered Calcutta only in order to find a decent camping ground. He also asked that the envoys should be sent to him. Armed with the Select Committee's proposals, Walsh and Scrafton set off for Nawabganj—where the *namab* himself was still supposed to be—on the morning of the 4th. It was not until the evening that they finally found him, at his camp in Calcutta. Scrafton recorded that 'at seven in the evening the *subah* gave them audience in Omichand's garden, where he affected to appear in great state, attended by the best looking men amongst his officers, hoping to intimidate them by so warlike an assembly'.

The envoys were not permitted to address the *nawab*, for he was 'firmly persuaded that they had private arms about them and waited to assassinate him'. The *nawab*'s ministers, on his behalf, refused the envoys' demand that he should withdraw his troops to Nawabganj. When the envoys asked to be allowed to leave, they were told to go and see first Ranjit Rai, the Jagat Seth's agent, as he 'had something to communicate to them that would be very agreeable to their colonel'. Walsh and Scrafton, suspecting the *nawab* of trying to detain them while he prepared to attack the fort, retired to their tents, pretended they had gone to sleep, and then escaped and rejoined Clive with the helpful information they had gleaned about the *nawab*'s camp.

Clive agreed that the *nawab* probably did intend to attack and decided to deliver the first blow himself. 'I went immediately on board Admiral Watson's ship,' he said, 'and represented to him the necessity for attacking the nabob without delay; and desired the assistance of four or five hundred sailors, to carry the ammunition and draw the artillery; which he assented to. The sailors were landed about one o'clock in the morning. About two, the troops were under arms, and by four, they marched to the attack of the nabob's camp.'

Estimates of the strength of the *nawab*'s army vary, but it is reasonable to accept that the numbers were in the region of 40,000, including 18,000 cavalry, forty guns and fifty elephants. Clive's force consisted of about 470 rank and file, 800 sepoys, 600 sailors, and seventy artillerymen, with one howitzer and six field-pieces. His plan was first to attack the enemy's camp, which was scattered widely to the east of the Maratha Ditch, to move through it to the causeway over the ricefields, and then to make for the *nawab*'s tent in Omichand's garden. Clive probably intended to capture or kill the *nawab*, which would have caused such confusion that the English could probably have placed someone more favourable to them on the throne. But the English never reached the *nawab*'s tent.

The morning was very misty and the guides lost their way. Instead of leading Clive direct to the *nawab*'s camp, they took him too far south. There the *nawab*'s guard appeared out of the fog and were almost completely annihilated by the British. In great confusion, the mist and darkness broken only by the flash of gunfire, the British force reached the causeway where they found themselves under very heavy fire. They withdrew into the Ditch itself. While they were reforming, two heavy guns opened fire on them, killing twenty





Your conduct yesterday morning,' he continued, 'greatly amazed me and put me to shame before the *namab*. . . . If you think war necessary acquaint me seriously with your intentions, and I will acquit myself of any further trouble in this affair.'

The *namab*'s reported acceptance of the demands was treated with some suspicion by the English. Watson thought that Ranjit Rai's letter was a trick, designed 'to amuse us in order to cover his [the *namab*'s] retreat and gain time until he is reinforced'. The admiral advised Clive 'not to be over-reached by his politics but make use of our arms' and suggested that a council of war be called. When it was, it agreed with Clive's opinion that further action was unnecessary.

When two days passed without news from Siraj-ud-daula, however, and when a letter then arrived from Ranjit Rai which seemed to advance matters not at all, Clive sent a peremptory note demanding that his proposals be accepted immediately. 'I am surprised,' he informed Ranjit Rai, 'that the nabob and you trifle. I observe that you are not inclinable to agree to our proposals. God is my witness that my actions have been open and generous, and that my inclinations have been peaceful. I now send you the articles wrote fair. Let the nabob sign "agreed" to each separate article in the manner that I have upon the copy. If this is done there shall be peace, if not, do not concern yourself further in this affair. War must take its course.'

The *namab* replied without further delay, accepting all the points, and formal agreements were exchanged between the two parties on February 9, signed by the *namab* and his ministers on one hand, and Watson and the Council of Fort William on the other. The British gained nearly all that they had hoped for, but one of the clauses was not quite as satisfactory as it initially appeared. The *namab* agreed that goods belonging to the Company, its servants, and tenants, should be restored and that 'what has been plundered and pillaged by his people shall be made good by the payment of such a sum of money as his justice shall think reasonable'. This was conditioned, however, by the *namab*'s promise to restore only 'whatever has been seized by my orders' and what had been entered in his books. This meant that the goods which had been looted by his officers and men on their own account would not be restored. Furthermore, no provision was made in the treaty for the losses of private sufferers, some of whom had been wholly ruined. But the *namab* did agree to provide a sum of Rs 300,000 in compensation to them, as well as an additional

sum to Clive and Kilpatrick, and a further 20,000 gold *mohurs* for distribution among the leading mediators. The Company, however, pocketed the lot, and nothing was paid to those who had helped bring the agreement about.

The Indians who had involved themselves on the Company's behalf might have been justified in thinking they had something to complain about, but there is no record that they actually did. The English, who had expected the *nawab* to pay for all their private losses, were highly vocal. Clive, supported by Major Kilpatrick, replied that 'it would give us great pleasure, as being considerable sufferers ourselves, if terms advantageous to private persons could be obtained . . . but our present insignificant strength, the situation of affairs upon the coast [of Coromandel], the absolute recallment of Colonel Clive with the greatest part of the forces, obliges us to give it as our opinion that by insisting upon terms still more advantageous we expose the Company to the risk of losing those already granted them'.

Clive was convinced that the French were plotting with the *nawab* and that, if the treaty had not been signed quickly, there would have been an alliance between them. Under the circumstances, his fear was not an unreasonable one. In any case, he was equally sure that further concessions might be extracted from the *nawab* by means of careful diplomacy at his court. To this end, William Watts was despatched to Murshidabad.

So far, Clive had no reason to be other than satisfied at the progress of events. The Company was re-established in Bengal with all their privileges intact. That had been the main motive for the expedition. The strategy of sword and pen had paid off, and the chances were, Clive thought, that it would continue to do so.

## Chapter XI

### TO DISPOSSESS THE FRENCH

AFTER THE success the treaty had brought the British, there was a period of hesitation. Little news arrived from the south, and it seemed possible that war would break out there between the British and the French, if it had not, in fact, already done so. With the first—and from the Company's point of view the most important—part of his instructions carried out, Clive wondered whether to return home to the south where the real danger lay, and perhaps have a 'slap at Bussy' on the way. For a few days before the treaty was actually concluded, Clive had once again given way to despair and self-depreciation. There seemed nothing more to be gained in Bengal as he did not anticipate extracting much from the *namab*. But once the treaty was settled his depression left him. The expedition had proved a success and his reputation could only be enhanced by it. He was still determined to return to the south, but his reasons had changed. Now he thought there was no purpose in remaining in Bengal because a firm peace had been achieved.

Clive wrote to Madras to say he was returning, and then changed his mind. His ambitions were immense. Above everything, he wanted to be a power in the world. He was a soldier only incidentally, for his real aim was to be a politician, a statesman. The treaty with the *namab* had satisfied the requirements of the Directors in London, and though most of the responsibility for the expedition's successes lay with Admiral Watson, Clive could—and would—claim the credit. His reports hardly mentioned the role played by the fleet, and, though he did admit that Watson 'had done everything that could be expected from a brave and gallant man and had been greatly instrumental towards settling the affairs of this province', his compliments had a note of gracious condescension about them. Watson, he implied, had been an excellent subaltern to the great commander, Clive.

It was important for Clive to impress the Directors of the East India Company with the magnitude of his achievement.

also be just as important to impress England's politicians with it. The Madras Council had already suggested that it would be a good thing to 'dispossess the French of Chandernagore'. If Clive could succeed in that, he would be able to bank on the patronage of the king's ministers in London. He wrote to his father: 'As this success has probably saved the Company, this is a proper time to push my interest. I have written to my Lord Chancellor, the Archbishop, Mr. Fox, and my Lord Barrington, Secretary at War, to desire their interest. I have likewise wrote to Messrs Mabbot, Drake, and Payne [Directors of the Company].' The way in which Clive's mind was working was revealed in the next sentence: 'I am desirous of being appointed governor-general of India if such an appointment should be necessary.' Such an appointment would have been revolutionary, for each of the three principal British settlements in India—Bengal, Madras and Bombay—acted quite independently and often on conflicting lines. Clive had observed, however, that part of the French success in the south had certainly been due to the fact that one man had authority over all the French in India.

Before the French could be attacked and disposed of, there were a number of factors which had to be taken into consideration. The first was the weakness of the English forces, particularly since this time they would be fighting Europeans, not natives. The second was the attitude of the *nawab*, who might still turn upon the English.


Even before the English had retaken Calcutta and signed the treaty with Siraj-ud-daula, the French had become convinced that they would attack them. This had been why the French had attempted to extract a promise of neutrality. Renault, the chief at Chandernagore, was in a very awkward position. His fortifications would not be adequate against a determined attack, and—though he heard of the outbreak of war in Europe before the British did—he had no authority to declare war himself and strike first, without permission from the French headquarters at Pondicherry. With the *nawab* on one side and the British on the other, the only hope that he could see of continuing French trade in Bengal was to hang on as best he might and hope for better times to come. He had, however, made such defensive preparations as he could. In December 1756, he began clearing the ground round the fort at Chandernagore of the houses that surrounded it and commanded, as they did at Fort William, the walls of the fort.

On January 4, unaware that the British had recaptured Calcutta, envoys from Renault had arrived at the town. Hastily, they

congratulated Watson on the achievement and enquired what the British thought about continuing the state of neutrality in Bengal. Watson replied by offering an alliance against the *nawab*, but the envoys had to tell him this would be unacceptable because they needed neutrality as a protection against the demands of the *nawab*; its value would be nullified if it involved coming out openly against him.

While the French envoys were with Watson, the Select Committee learned that the British in Bombay had publicly declared war against the French. On January 7, however, the Committee wrote to Watson asking him to arrange a pact of neutrality with the French in Bengal. For some reason the letter was not actually delivered to Watson until three days later, after the envoys had left. Watson replied that, having offered the French an alliance and been refused, he was not prepared to negotiate for less. He said, nevertheless, that he would not himself attack the French if such an action might be harmful to the Company's interests.

Watson modified his rather unhelpful attitude almost immediately, when the news arrived that war had begun in Europe. He suggested three courses of action to the Committee. The French could be offered what they had originally asked for, namely, simple neutrality without any strings. They could be offered, for a second time, what the envoys had already refused—neutrality, with an alliance against the *nawab*. Or they could be driven from Bengal by force of arms. The Committee did in fact decide in favour of the first alternative, but because more urgent matters intervened—in the form of the *nawab's* army—nothing was done about it.

The preoccupation of the British with more immediate concerns left the French with very little choice. Jean Law favoured an alliance with the *nawab* against the British, and Renault seems to have been inclined to agree with him. He wrote to his superiors in Paris: 'We shall not hesitate to ally ourselves with the *nawab*, whose friendship may procure us great advantages in the augmentation of our privileges and several other matters not to mention the injury we shall do to the special enemy of our nation in obliging her to retire perhaps with loss, and to abandon an enterprise for the accomplishment of which she had stripped her principal establishments in India.' Law was convinced that, if the *nawab* came to terms with the British without any assistance from the French, it was highly unlikely that the *nawab* would help the French if they, in turn, were attacked by the British. But the opinion  and

Renault were not shared by the other French and, though they might have tried to carry out their policy without the support of their colleagues, they had no opportunity to do so; instructions were received from Pondicherry that they were not to engage in hostile activity against the British.

This order left the French in Bengal without any avenue for initiative. When, therefore, towards the end of January, they were asked to mediate between the *namab* and the British, it came as something of a relief. It might just, they thought, be possible to insinuate into any treaty between Siraj-ud-daula and the British a clause relating to continued neutrality. Unfortunately, the British refused the French offer of mediation though they themselves raised the subject of neutrality. This was for the very simple reason that they knew they could not hope to win against the *namab* and the French combined, and believed that any sign of hostility against the French would drive them straight into the arms of the *namab*. So variable was the state of affairs in Bengal, however, that Renault at that moment actually feared the *namab* more than he did the British; Siraj-ud-daula with his immense army was near Chandernagore. Renault's situation was extremely awkward and he decided that, for the moment, it would be better to do nothing.

After the treaty between the *namab* and the British had been signed, the French position seemed to improve. As the *namab* passed Chandernagore after his defeat by the British, he sent Renault Rs 100,000—a third of the money, in fact, which he had extorted from the French in the previous year. He also gave the French a *parwana* granting them all the same privileges as he had been forced to grant the British. He further offered them, in return for the town of Hugli, an alliance. Renault accepted the money but not the alliance. But the *namab* asked for and, despite the instructions to the contrary from Pondicherry, received from Renault a promise to 'oppose the passage of the English past Chandernagore' if they should make any attempt to attack the *namab*. The British were convinced that a full secret alliance had been agreed upon.

Now that Clive had begun to plan his own future on the basis of driving the French out of Bengal, the British were all agreed on what had to be done. It was necessary, however, to have the *namab's* permission before attacking the French. The British had in fact tried to get it while the treaty was under negotiation, but no one at the *namab's* court had been prepared to put the proposal to him. After signing the treaty, the *namab* had written to both Clive and Watson,

saying: 'As long as I have life I shall esteem your enemies as enemies to me and will assist you to the utmost of my power wherever you may require it.' Some of the Select Committee took this to mean that the *nawab* would not oppose any attack on the French at Chandernagore and urged Watson to take the initiative. He, however, did not see matters in that light. He did not feel that the *nawab's* letter could be taken as permission to attack, nor, since his troops had suffered badly from fever, did he wish to embark on a new campaign until reinforcements arrived. Furthermore, he could not move his ships up river until after the spring tides. The Committee did not press the matter for the time being. It still believed it essential to win the *nawab's* agreement to an attack on the French, however, and when Watts was sent to Murshidabad as envoy he was instructed to ensure that permission was given. Watts was accompanied by Omichand, now back in favour and ready to do anything in his power to help the British.

The *nawab*, who was well aware that the British were meditating an attack on the French, had decided on his attitude. He would follow the old policy of preserving the peace but would give it the new slant which circumstances seemed to demand by supporting whichever of the two Companies was the victim of aggression. In pursuit of this policy, he ordered his governor at Hugli, Nand Kumar, 'to assist the French with all his force, in case the English should attack Chandernagore, or if the French should attack the English, to assist them in the same manner, that there may be no quarrels or disputes in this country'. When a rumour reached Siraj-ud-daula that Bussy, who was only some two hundred miles away to the south, had decided to march to the assistance of Renault and Law in Bengal, and that a French fleet was also on the way, he sent a message to Clive asking him to 'prevent the French from entering his kingdom by land or water'.

The first British response to the *nawab's* manoeuvres was to suborn Nand Kumar. When Watts arrived at Hugli on February 17, he sent Omichand with a bribe to win over the *nawab's* governor. This proved successful and Watts acquired a great deal of information about the *nawab's* dealings with the French. When, on the 21st, Watts reached the *nawab's* camp forty miles south of Murshidabad, Omichand also bribed his chief spy and heard that Siraj-ud-daula had no intention of keeping the promises he had made in the treaty with the British. At the camp, and later at Murshidabad, Watts found himself up against French intrigues and discovered that



nothing could be done to combat them except 'in the mode of the court—that is, by opposing corruption with corruption, making friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, and getting upon even ground with those whom we are obliged to contend'. In such a situation, Omichand was invaluable.

Meanwhile, on February 18, Clive had crossed the river in preparation for an attack on Chandernagore if the *nawab's* permission materialized. Renault once again opened negotiations for neutrality. He wrote on the subject to Calcutta, and on the same day as his letter arrived another was delivered from the *nawab* 'absolutely forbidding hostilities against the French'. It would, he said, be a violation of the treaty. The British, he added, had also been planning to attack him himself during the rainy season, and he had only been prevented from sending troops under Mir Jafar to forestall them by the opportune arrival of Omichand who, 'with persuasion sweeter than honey on his lips', had convinced him that he had nothing to fear.

The *nawab's* 'conviction' was by no means complete. In fact, he immediately wrote to Bussy to claim that 'these disturbers of my country, the Admiral and Colonel Clive . . . are warring against . . . the governor of Chandernagore. I, who in all things seek the good of mankind, assist him in every respect . . . I have wrote you before for two thousand soldiers and musketry . . . I persuade myself you have already sent them.' The *nawab's* chief spy promptly made the contents of this letter known to Watts.

In reply to Siraj-ud-daula's letter taxing Watson and Clive with preparing to attack the French, Watson wrote: 'Had I imagined it would have given you umbrage, I should have never entertained the least thoughts of disturbing the tranquillity of your country, by acting against that nation within the Ganges; and am now ready to desist from attacking . . . if they will consent to a solid treaty of neutrality, and if you . . . will under your hand guarantee this treaty.' Clive also wrote to the *nawab* confirming Watson's statements but adding that he had been put to 'great shame' by the *nawab's* order, as 'I could have taken the [Chandernagore] fort in two days'.

At Murshidabad, Watts—with his access to the *nawab's* correspondence with Bussy—considered this appeasement foolish. The *nawab's* 'governing principle or reigning passion', he argued, 'is fear, and by that alone is he to be swayed, therefore if we attack and take Chandernagore every part of our agreement will be fulfilled and

more indulgences granted us. If we are unsuccessful we shall get nothing, and if a neutrality is concluded with the French no chicanery, artifice or cunning will be left untried to delay putting us in possession of what the *namab* has assented to . . . We shall never be able to get a public order or leave to attack the French. If he tacitly acquiesces in it and does not molest us it is all we can expect.'

Watts's letter was written on February 25. Three French envoys had arrived in Calcutta the same day. The Select Committee asked them whether they had the authority with which to conclude a 'neutrality which shall be binding on all Frenchmen within the prescribed limits' (in other words, Bengal); whether they would stop the French navy from attacking the British; and whether, among other matters, they were prepared to stop fortifying Chandernagore. The envoys replied that they were so empowered, though they could not agree to stop work on their defences, which were, they said, designed as protection 'in case of revolution'. A treaty was therefore drafted and, on March 2, the Committee decided 'to write to Admiral Watson sending a copy of the treaty explaining our reasons and asking his opinion and whether he will agree thereto on behalf of His Majesty and lodge with us a confirmation of the treaty on his part'.

Watson replied that he did not believe, and never had believed, that Renault had the authority to conclude such a treaty, and he could not endorse it until the terms had been accepted by the French chief at Pondicherry. The Committee then asked the admiral either to reconsider his objections or 'assist us with a squadron to attack Chandernagore without delay'. Watson remained adamant. He had promised the *namab* not to attack Chandernagore and he intended to keep his promise—at least until Siraj-ud-daula himself contravened the terms of the treaty.

Clive's position during these negotiations was rather equivocal. With no positive action in prospect he was again prey to doubts. He expressed his dissatisfaction at Watson's refusal to support the Committee in their dealings with the French. 'You may be assured,' he said, 'the instant the French find these offers of neutrality refused they will immediately assist the nabob in all his designs against us.' Clive informed the Council that, if there was to be no attack on Chandernagore, and no treaty, he must return to Madras. He would, it seems, have preferred a treaty with the French at this stage because he did not yet feel strong enough to attack them—or, rather, to start on a campaign that would go beyond the capture of Chandernagore. 'If you attack Chandernagore,' he wrote, 'you cannot stop there, you

must go further. Having established yourselves by force and not by the consent of the nabob, he by force will attempt to drive you out again.' But within two days he was once again in the best of spirits. There were two reasons for this. The more important was that reinforcements had arrived from Bombay. These consisted of 400 men, who brought the number of Clive's force up to 700 Europeans and 1,600 sepoys. The *Cumberland* also arrived from Madras after a difficult voyage with about 300 men. Now Clive was strong enough to attack.

The second reason for the revival of Clive's spirits was to be found in a postscript added in the *namab*'s own hand to a letter from Watts. 'The advanced forces of the new [Afghan] king Ahmad Shah Abdali,' he wrote, 'are endeavouring to make an eruption into Bengal and I purpose marching to Azimabad [Patna]. If you will join me upon this occasion and go with me, I will allow you every month a *lakh* [100,000] of rupees.' Siraj-ud-daula had made the same appeal to Watson on February 22, but Watson had not told the Committee. Instead, he had replied to the *namab* that, if the French were disposed of first, the British would then 'go with you even to Delhi if you will'. Siraj-ud-daula did not respond to this communication, but Watson heard that he had appealed to the French for aid against the Afghans. The admiral once more wrote to the *namab*, and this time his letter vibrated with threats as well as righteous indignation. 'As I have always acted the open, unreserved part in all my dealings with you,' he claimed, 'I now acquaint you that the remainder of the troops, which should have been here long since (and which I hear the colonel told you he expected), will be at Calcutta in a few days; that in a few days more I shall despatch a vessel for more ships and more troops; and that I will kindle such a flame in your country as all the water in the Ganges shall not be able to extinguish. Farewell: remember that he promises you this, who never yet broke his word with you or with any man whatsoever.'

Whether it was Watson's threat or Omichand and Watts's diplomacy that produced results is not clear; certainly, Watts made skilful use of 'the *namab*'s dread of the Afghans and observed to him that he could never think of leaving our settlement to be attacked by the French' while aiding Siraj-ud-daula against the Afghans. On March 10, the *namab* sent Watson a letter which concluded: 'You have understanding, and generosity; if your enemy with an upright heart claims your protection, you will give him your life, but then you must be well satisfied of his intention; if not, whatever you think

right, that do.' Watson took this as permission to attack Chandernagore.

Watts also wrote to Clive: 'The nabob said he could not write, but desired I would inform you that if you was determined to attack the French, he would not intermeddle or give them the least assistance, he only requests to be informed of your sentiments three or four days before you begin upon action.'

Jean Law suggested that the letter to Watson was not written on the *nawab's* orders, but that Watts bribed the *nawab's* secretary 'to pen this important epistle in a proper style' and to affix the *nawab's* seal. It is more probable that Watts paid the secretary to write the letter with considerable haste before the *nawab* changed his mind. Whatever the truth, the letter was duly despatched, and Watson received it on the 11th or 12th.

Watson's unwillingness to attack Chandernagore now vanished. When he sent a copy of the *nawab's* letter to the Select Committee, he informed them that he had received instructions from the Admiralty in London that the 'declaration of war [against France] is an order to all officers under the King to distress the enemy as far as it is in their power'. As soon as possible, he said, he would send his ships up river.

Clive, using the *nawab's* appeal for aid as an excuse, rejoined his troops on March 8. The French, hearing of this, wrote to demand an explanation and received the then perfectly honest reply that 'I very sincerely declare to you that at this present time I have no intention to attack your settlement'. Clive added helpfully: 'If I should alter my mind, I shall not fail to advise you of it.' Nevertheless, he continued his march and by the time Watson received the *nawab's* letter he was close to Chandernagore. On March 12 he was encamped about two miles to the west of the settlement and was collecting information from his spies as to the extent of the French preparations to resist him.

Once again, however, Clive appears to have given in to depression. He feared that a long campaign awaited him in Bengal, for he was convinced that, after attacking the French, there would be no going back. He was worried as to what effect his actions would have in the south. The defences of Madras, weakened to supply him with men, might fail to withstand the French. There was always, too, the possibility that he might be defeated at Chandernagore. The forces ranged against Clive were, on the surface, formidable. Besides the French garrison at Chandernagore, there were two thousand of the

*nawab's* men under Rai Durlabh at Plassey, another four or five thousand under Manik Chand even nearer, and a strong garrison at Hugli. The French still had powerful friends at the *nawab's* court and it remained possible that they might yet persuade him to support the French.

But the British, though they did not know it, had even more powerful friends. There was a conspiracy afoot to overthrow Siraj-ud-daula, and he was receiving contradictory advice from his officers, who played upon his fears. Watts, too, was continuing the good work of keeping the *nawab's* apprehensions over an Afghan invasion at boiling point.

When Clive learned of the *nawab's* letter to Watson, he wrote to Renault at Chandernagore:

Sir—the King of Great Britain having declared war against France, I summons you in his name to surrender the fort of Chandernagore. In case of refusal you are to answer the consequences and expect to be treated according to the usage of war in such case. I have the honour to be, sir, your most obedient and humble servant,

R. Clive.

On the following day, March 14, having received no reply from Renault, Clive ceremonially read the declaration of war to his troops and began the siege of the French settlement by attacking an outpost to the south-west of the fort.

Once the decision had been made to attack, Clive believed that prompt action was essential so that the fort might be captured before the *nawab's* troops could interfere. He was also relying on Watts to prevent the *nawab* from coming to the aid of the French until it was too late.

Renault, after losing ten men at the outpost which was the object of Clive's first attack, found that he could muster only 237 soldiers, 120 sailors, 70 Eurasians and civilians, 100 merchants and ships' officers, 167 sepoys, and 100 Eurasian artillerymen—in all, 794 men to defend fortifications which were in no state to stand a siege. For some reason, perhaps on instructions from the *nawab*, Nand Kumar had sent two thousand men from the garrison at Hugli to assist the French, but the moment Clive opened the attack they deserted, perhaps on orders, perhaps from fear.

To begin with, Clive did not press his attack very strongly. He preferred to await Watson's arrival, since his own force had no siege

guns. Nevertheless, he occupied a number of outposts, and it was at this point that Nand Kumar's contingent deserted. When he heard of it, Nand Kumar—who had been bought by the British—sent a message to the *nawab* informing him that Chandernagore had fallen. This so frightened Siraj-ud-daula that Law was unable to persuade him to order his troops to the aid of Renault.

Clive's progress was slow. By March 22, against stiff opposition, he managed to get a battery of 24-pounders into position to bombard the inner works of the fort. At daybreak the next day, the fleet, which had been lying some two miles down river, reached Chandernagore. Its passage had not been easy. The tides made it difficult to move up, and the French had obstructed the river, which was very narrow at this point, by sinking 'two ships, a ketch, a scow, a hulk and a vessel without masts' in the channel by the fort. They had also put booms across the river. Above the fort, three vessels had been converted into fireships. A small British naval party cut the cable to release them. If they had floated down, ablaze, among the highly inflammable British ships gathered in the narrow channel they could have caused chaos, but all three drifted instead on to a sandbank. On the morning of March 20, Watson had sent a lieutenant under a flag of truce to demand Renault's surrender. At that time, Clive's small-bore artillery had done very little damage to the main fortifications and, as Renault believed the river to be efficiently blocked, he refused the demand and offered a ransom instead. As the lieutenant was rowed past the sunken ships, however, he saw that there was an unobstructed channel through which the British fleet might pass. That same evening, under heavy fire from the French, one of the British captains buoyed the channel. The fleet now prepared to move up opposite the fort, but, because of the tides, it was unable to do so until the 23rd.

Just before daybreak, Clive attacked and took the French battery commanding the river passage. The *Tyger*, *Kent* and *Salisbury* negotiated the buoyed passage between the sunken vessels and, at about 7 a.m., the first two took up positions opposite the north-east and south-east bastions of the fort. The *Kent* had been intended to lie off the centre curtain of the fort but had been caught by the current and dragged down river again, blocking the *Salisbury's* approach. It was therefore left to the *Tyger* and the *Kent* to bombard the fort. Strangely enough, both ships flew an admiral's flag. Watson was on board the *Kent*, and Admiral Pocock—  
was the *Cumberland*—had come up in his barge 'with

of an English admiral' to take part in the attack. He had hoisted his flag on the *Tyger*.

The duel between the guns of the fort and the guns of the ships was savage. Most of the *Kent*'s officers were killed, and the ship herself was so badly mauled that she never put to sea again. Watson himself was said to have behaved 'very cool'. At one time, a shot struck between the decks and began a fire which raised great clouds of smoke. Many of the crew, believing the gunnery and ammunition store had been hit and momentarily expecting the entire ship to blow up, took to the boats. They were shamed, however, by an appeal to the traditional British virtues. 'Are you Britons?' an officer is alleged to have taunted them. 'You, Englishmen, and fly from danger?' Apparently this harangue had the desired effect, and, 'to a man they immediately returned into the ship, repaired to their quarters, and renewed a spirited fire on the enemy'.

The battle continued for nearly three hours. In the fort, the batteries were piled with dead and wounded and the walls were torn to pieces. Clive and his men waited close by, ready to attack. But Renault decided to surrender and ordered 'the drum to beat a parley'. Lieutenant Brereton, the only officer of the *Kent* who had not been killed or wounded, and Captain Eyre Coote went into the fort under a flag of truce and, reported Coote, 'in about a quarter of an hour, I returned to the admiral with the governor's son and a letter concerning the delivery of the place'.

The terms of surrender were discussed. The most important were that the officers of the garrison were to be 'prisoners on their parole of honour'; they were to go free provided they swore not to fight against the British as long as hostilities continued. The ordinary soldiers were to be prisoners of war, and the sepoys were to return to their homes. Under the terms of the parole, the officers—and civilians were taken to be included in this category—were to have leave 'to go where they pleased with their clothes and linen'. The articles of surrender were signed by Watson and Pocock, and Clive was also allowed to sign—though Watson objected that he was not entitled to do so, as it was really the fleet which had captured the fort.

Casualties on both sides during the action were severe. The three-hour battering of the fort cost the French over 200 killed and wounded. On the British side, Clive's force had hardly been scratched, because his attack was well planned and his part in the engagement limited. It was on board the *Tyger* and the *Kent* that the real damage

had been done. The *Tyger* had lost thirteen men killed and fifty wounded, including Admiral Pocock, who was described by one of his officers as 'very lame and swelled about the legs but not greatly hurt; the splinters flew so thickly around him that he was scratched most shockingly and covered with blood from head to foot'. Among the *Kent's* many casualties were the commander, Captain Speke, and his son. 'One shot took off Captain Speke's calf of his left leg, and struck off Billy Speke's thigh; as soon as one got up he saw the other and a shocking sight it was. Billy bore it very courageously, and the other was no more concerned for himself but said, "Father and son at one time and with one shot is hard indeed".' Billy Speke was sixteen years old. He died of his wounds.

Many of the soldiers and sailors were angry at what they considered too lenient terms for the men who had killed or maimed so many of their comrades, and they began to plunder the town. The church plate was taken, and the treasury broken open. Clive finally hanged two or three of the soldiers and sepoys to discourage the others, and withdrew his camp outside the town in order to cut his men off from the supply of liquor they had discovered in the deserted houses.

During the surrender negotiations, two events had occurred which were to have unhappy consequences for the French since the British chose to treat them as breaches of the courtesies of war. A store of gunpowder exploded (accidentally, the French maintained) which destroyed a large quantity of valuable loot. In the confusion, some soldiers and civilians—including British deserters, for desertion was the endemic disease of eighteenth-century armies—broke through the north gate and tried to make their escape to Kasimbazar. Forty of them actually succeeded in joining Law there, while the other hundred or so were killed or captured. Those who reached Kasimbazar helped to swell the French garrison there to about a hundred Europeans and sixty sepoys.

The French officers and civilians who had given their parole left Chandernagore for the Dutch settlement at Chinsurah. Among their number was M. Renault. Though they had promised not to serve or act against Britain during the remainder of the war, they were soon proceeding as if nothing out of the ordinary had ever happened. They began to deal officially with the other French trading posts as well as with the *nawab's* government. They also gave aid to the French who had escaped from Chandernagore and were making for Kasimbazar.

Clive demanded that they surrender to their parole, and promised



to come and take them by force if they refused. The French appealed to Bisdorn, the Dutch chief at Chinsurah, but he told them that the matter was none of his concern. As he had no defences and few soldiers, he was not prepared to risk antagonizing the British. He had given refuge to the French women and children before the attack on Chandernagore and felt, quite reasonably, that he had done all that humanity required. Clive's sepoys surrounded the houses occupied by the French, who, anxious to protect their families, had to surrender. They were sent down to Calcutta but were released from there on June 15 and later allowed to return to Chandernagore.

The rest of the French were allowed to live with their families where they wished, and most, for obvious reasons, chose Chandernagore. The soldiers held as prisoners of war, however, were kept in the common jail. A few months later fifty of them dug their way out and escaped. Some finally reached Pondicherry, but most were either killed or recaptured.

The defeat of the French at Chandernagore was of enormous value to the British. It not only destroyed French influence in Bengal but dealt, as Clive put it, 'an inexpressible blow to the French Company' everywhere. In south India, native princes threatened by the French were to be more inclined to turn to the British for aid. In western India, where the French were intriguing in the ruins of the Mughal empire, the power of France no longer seemed so impressive. The capture of Chandernagore brought safety to Calcutta and gave the British undisputed control of the river.

The immediate material advantages were also great. In Bengal, all the naval and military stores which had been lost in the *nawab's* attack on Calcutta were replaced from the French stocks at Chandernagore.

When the news reached London, East India stock went up twelve per cent. The French East India Company lost its largest source of revenue. Without the capture of Chandernagore, Plassey and the founding of an empire would not have been possible.

## Chapter XII

### ALL THE CONSPIRATORS

IT IS not certain when Clive actually became aware of the plots to overthrow Siraj-ud-daula. He knew, certainly, that there were a large number of disaffected persons near to the sources of power in Bengal, but he was by no means adequately informed on who was in fact conspiring with whom to do what. This was perfectly understandable in a situation in which the only constant factors were dissimulation, deceit, and a willingness to be bribed.

It was clear, however, that the English had allies amongst the merchants and bankers, whose interests were very close to theirs. This class of Bengal society, mainly Hindus and Jains, had a sense of religious as well as commercial solidarity, but they were not opposed to the *namab* for religious reasons. It was simply that the Europeans offered business opportunities *that were not available elsewhere* in an India already economically disturbed. The *namab*, with his attempts to bully the Europeans, threatened to interrupt and perhaps even end this profitable trade. The expulsion of the English from Calcutta and all the upsets that had followed had reduced the flow of trade considerably, and it was necessary to get things back to normal. Since the English were pressing forward after their recapture of Calcutta, it was only natural that the conspirators should turn to them as the rising power rather than to the French or the Dutch. After Chandernagore, there was no question of choice.

All the intermediaries who had previously attempted to settle matters between the English and the *namab* had been agents either of the bankers or of merchants who were already closely involved with the English. There seems to have been no coordinated policy among them, with the result that there was a certain amount of conflict between the intermediaries themselves. Omichand, for example, was obviously acting on his own initiative and for his own purposes when he made the overtures to the English which led to his being appointed as their agent with Watts at Murshidabad. Omichand was chief supplier to the English merchants of saltpetre

—a very profitable commodity—and he had suffered not only in business but in the conflict with the *nawab*. His own position had been somewhat equivocal, at least in English eyes, but there is no doubt that everything he did was with his own interests in mind, and he could hardly be blamed for that.

When the news first came that the British had returned in force to Bengal, he had thought it wise to leave Calcutta for Murshidabad. The British retaking their settlement, seized the property he had left behind on suspicion of treason. At the end of January, Omichand wrote to Clive, saying; ‘God be praised that Calcutta is again restored to its former splendour by your arrival. Most fortunate is their lot who serve you, but how unhappy is mine who am secluded from your presence by my confinement, which you must be acquainted with. I hope that when I shall have the honour to be called to attend you I shall be able to find means to procure my liberty. At present I understand that I lie under your displeasure by means of some evil persons who have misreported me to you . . . I have made it the subject of my constant devotion that God would bring back my masters into the country. God has granted my prayers. How little I am deserving of blame will be evident when I appear before you, and then I shall have justice done me.’ Omichand was doing his best to imply that he was virtually a prisoner of the *nawab*’s, but apparently he failed to convince Clive of this, for Clive wrote to him on February 9 inviting him to come and see him and offering a safe conduct. When Omichand arrived at the British camp, however, he appears to have been imprisoned.

Omichand’s ability to ingratiate himself had not deserted him. Soon he was released to act as intermediary with the *nawab* after the treaty had been signed. When Watts was sent to Murshidabad, it was decided that he should be accompanied by Omichand, ‘whose conduct in the late negotiations had effaced the impression of former imputations, in so much that Mr. Watts was permitted to consult and employ him without reserve’.

Thus, one merchant was close to the heart of things. There were others, too. Above all, there were the banker, the Jagat Seth, and his brother, the maharaja Swarup Chand. The British referred to the two men as ‘the Seths’. It was their agent, Ranjit Rai, who had handled the treaty with the *nawab* after Calcutta had been retaken. Clive was fully aware of their importance. On February 16, he wrote to the two brothers: ‘Omichand has acquainted me that you sent Ranjit Rai to attend his Excellency the Nabob for the procuring

the peace of the country and the re-establishment of the Company's business and in all my proceedings I have never acted without his advice. The treaty has been agreed to and ratified on both sides in the most solemn manner. The signal kindness which you have shown in your endeavours to restore the currency of the Company's trade I have made particular mention of in my letters to Europe.'

The Seths' position at court had changed after the British reoccupied Calcutta, when it became clear that it was their agents who were the intermediaries most acceptable to the English. The *namab* does not seem to have accepted this situation with any pleasure, and though he treated the Seths with courtesy and consulted them in matters of high policy, it was said that in private he was planning their downfall. Whether this was true, or whether it was yet another layer of deceit—perhaps this time entangling the Seths—is hard to tell. Spies have a habit of retailing information which suits their own and their masters' purposes, and truth does not always play the largest part in it. Siraj-ud-daula knew, however, that he was once again surrounded by potential treacheries and that their was hardly anyone he could trust wholeheartedly. There is little doubt that he hated the Seths (and he had ample reason to), or that in return the Seths came to hate the *namab*.

Under these pressures, it was hardly surprising that the *namab* vacillated. When the British were preparing their attack on Chandernagore, he could not make up his mind what to do. The weight of the advice he received was in favour of doing nothing. Law, who was very active at his court, tried to persuade the Seths to support the French claims, even if only on the ground that the French owed them a great deal of money which they would be unlikely ever to see if Chandernagore fell to the British. But he was met with evasion and dissimulation and ended in the conviction that the Seths were conspiring with the British to overthrow the *namab*. He went so far—or so he claimed—as to warn the *namab* against the Seths, but 'the poor young man began to laugh, being unable to imagine that I could be so silly as to indulge in such ideas'. It seems that Law, for all his shrewdness, could be deceived, and by the *namab* whose character and intelligence he pretended so much to despise. The *namab* must have been aware of the Seths' attitude towards him, but it was obvious that he was unwilling to precipitate a crisis. He was certainly not aware that any conspiracy existed between the Seths and the English, for the simple reason that no conspiracy existed at that time. Law, in his memoirs, was glossing over the failures of the French.

At the beginning of the Anglo-French crisis, in fact, the Seths and others at court had advised Siraj-ud-daula to do all he could to maintain neutrality between the two parties. It was only after it became obvious that, come what might, the English were determined to attack the French, that the Seths ceased giving that advice. It had been advice that coincided with Siraj-ud-daula's own inclination, but he was by no means sure that it was the right policy. He soon regretted sending the letter which Watson had interpreted as giving permission to attack Chandernagore and asked Watts to stop Clive from embarking on the siege. In a personal endeavour to call Clive off, the *namab* wrote to him on March 15, saying that he had received friendly overtures from Ahmad Shah Abdali and implying that it was no longer necessary to destroy the French as a preliminary to marching against the Afghans. The fact that the Afghans no longer threatened him was, he suggested, the result of 'my friendship with you. I therefore write that you need not give yourself the trouble of coming. I have great pleasure in your friendship. Since on a single letter of mine you were ready to come to my assistance I make no doubt that whenever I shall desire you to come and assist me, you will be ready to join me. I now write that you need not give yourself the trouble of coming.'

One letter did not seem adequate to the *namab* in this matter. Indeed, according to Watts he positively bombarded Clive, who 'received no less than ten of them in one day, and these in very opposite styles, which the colonel answered punctually with all the calmness and complaisance imaginable, expressing great concern at the impression which the calumnies of his enemies had made on that prince's mind, and assuring him of his sincere attachment as long as he adhered to the treaty'. The *namab* even sent an envoy to try to mediate between the British and the French for he had received reports from Renault of great successes against the British. The envoy, however, soon discovered that these successes were mythical. His report 'extolled the English highly and threw all the blame upon the French'. Nand Kumar, who had received a further sweetener from the British, threw in his weight against the French by writing to the *namab* to report that, 'as the French were unable to resist the English he had therefore ordered his troops to Hugli, lest his victorious colours be involved in this disgrace'. He was, no doubt, referring to the two thousand men who had deserted the French as soon as Clive attacked.

The *namab*, hearing that Clive's guns had done little damage to

the French defences, ordered Rai Durlabh to move his troops towards Chandernagore. He hoped, perhaps, to frighten Clive. Clive, however, responded with threats. 'I hear you are arrived within twenty miles of Hugli. Whether you are come as a friend or an enemy I know not. If as the latter, say so at once, and I will send some people out to fight you immediately. If as the former, I beg you will stay where you are, for we can conquer the enemies we have to deal with here if they were ten times stronger.' Rai Durlabh stayed where he was. Clive wrote to the *nawab* at the same time, saying that he had as yet 'only made use of musketry' against the French, but that he proposed to bombard the fort in such a way that 'by the blessings of God I hope the place will be our own tomorrow'. He ended with a pleasant irony, by pretending that Rai Durlabh had been marching to aid the British rather than the French. 'I am much obliged to you,' he wrote, 'but in this case have no occasion for assistance.'

Next day, Chandernagore fell and Clive hastened to inform the *nawab* of his victory—which had been won with the continued blessing of God and the 'influence of [the *nawab*'s] favour'. The *nawab* declared his 'inexpressible pleasure' at the British victory and thanked God that 'your enemies so easily fell into your hands, and that their great place is fallen into your hands. You have no longer any uneasiness on their account. It has pleased God to make you and all your friends happy in this great victory.'

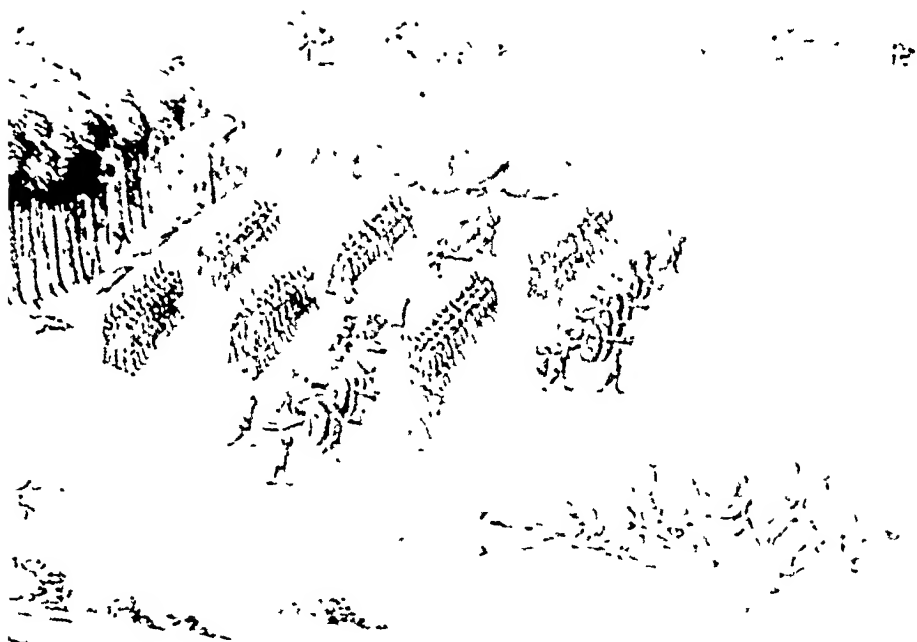
Such effusions did not, of course, prevent Siraj-ud-daula from secretly giving encouragement to Law at Kasimbazar, or from sending letters to the French general, Bussy, who was reported to have moved from the Deccan to Cuttack, about two hundred miles from Calcutta. He feared, too, that the British fleet might turn its attention to Murshidabad—though it was not in fact possible for the British ships to move further up river—and ordered that the channel be blocked at Suti, and also at Plassey.

Watts, at the capital, now received new instructions from Clive—which are worth quoting in full—on the course he was to adopt with the *nawab*. 'The bent of our politics hitherto,' said Clive, 'has been by haughty and by submissive letters such as the occasion required to persuade him to abandon the French to us. We must in pursuit of that system now endeavour to convince [him] that what we have done is best both for him and us; the argument that will best serve that purpose must be drawn from their actions on the coast of Coromandel, compared with ours on the same, that as soon as they had

made themselves masters of [the Deccan] they would not have scrupled attempting the same here. Represent to him in the strongest light what a state that have reduced Salabut Jang [the *nizam*] to, that they have extorted whole provinces from him. While the man that we support is immensely indebted to us, that by our last advices from the coast they have exhibited a new piece of treachery in the murder of raja Vizeramroy whom they had invited to a feast, and conclude the whole with assuring him that our sole view is to stop the ambitious progress of the French, to effect which he must enter into a strict alliance with us. That we shall always be ready to support him against his enemies, and that we desire in our return only a strict compliance with his treaty with us and free currency for our trade; that we do not aim at any further possessions than what our *firman* has given us; that we shall henceforwards act as merchants, but shall always keep a force sufficient to support him against all his enemies. Tell him with such an army as I now command the French would not fail to raise disturbances in his country and never lay down their arms till they had extorted at least a province from him. But that our whole aim is to have the treaty made with him strictly complied with. That it is absolutely necessary that the good work now begun should be completed and that he give up to us the French and their property wherever they are found.'

Clearly, the capture of Chandernagore was by no means enough from Clive's point of view. The possibility of an alliance between the *nawab* and Bussy still seemed to threaten, and as long as the French remained at Kasimbazar French influence at the capital also remained. Despite urgent appeals from Madras for his return, Clive had therefore decided that he must expel the French from Bengal. It was necessary to do this at speed, before the time of year arrived in which the winds were favourable for sailing ships to make the voyage to Madras. A few days after the capture of Chandernagore, Clive had written to Pigot, the governor of Madras: 'I make no doubt but that the forces are impatiently expected at Madras. It is a very great blow which has detained them—no less than the attack and taking of Chandernagore; of more consequence to the Company, in my opinion, than the taking of Pondicherry itself.' He concluded by saying that if the French were totally destroyed in Bengal, the rest of the French possessions in India would soon decline. He hoped, he said, 'to settle everything here in the most advantageous manner' before the end of August.

Instructions were now sent to Watts that he should press a new



BATTLE OF PLASSEY, FROM A CONTEMPORARY PLAN.  
CLIVE'S FORCES, WITH THE HUNTING LODGE AND GROVE  
TO THEIR REAR

BATTLE OF PLASSEY. THE ARMY OF SIRAJ-UD-DAULA







EYRE COOTE

demand on the *nawab*, who was to be asked to force the French to give up their remaining factories. The move was directed against Kasimbazar, since the French settlement at Balasore had been taken without a fight after the fall of Chandernagore.

Admiral Watson wrote to Siraj-ud-daula several times but received no satisfactory reply. After threatening him, on April 19, the admiral finally gave up the correspondence. Although he was fully prepared to fight the French, Watson felt it dishonourable to use the war as an excuse for extorting wider concessions from the *nawab* once a treaty had been signed with him. Nevertheless, he was quite prepared to look on with well-bred distaste while Clive continued his own efforts on behalf of the Company.

On March 29, Clive had written to the *nawab* to say that as long as France and Britain were at war in Europe they would also be at war in Bengal. There would therefore be no peace for the *nawab* unless he gave up the French settlements to the British. Then, said Clive, the British would be 'without rivals and our whole thoughts ready to obey your commands and assist you in punishing all those who dare to molest the peace of your kingdom'. The *nawab*, well aware that his own safety would be better served if the rivalry between the French and the British continued rather than ended, was now, after Chandernagore, hardly in a position to control events. He did, however, manage to produce a number of objections to Clive's proposition. The French, he argued, had settled in the country with the permission of the emperor at Delhi; if Siraj-ud-daula expelled them, it would reduce the imperial revenues. This argument had a certain irony, for the emperor was a puppet, and Bengal had not transmitted any revenues to Delhi for years. Siraj-ud-daula's tactics, in any case, proved unavailing, and he finally suggested that Clive should put pressure on Renault to give the *nawab* a written injunction authorizing him to surrender the French factories to the British. Afterwards, the *nawab* said, whatever the French had previously paid into the treasury, 'write to Mr. Watts to make good here, and it is very well; then you keep possession of the factory. But if it be agreeable to you, it will be showing yourself a man of great mind to give it up to them that they may carry on their trade as before.' Clive, though otherwise willing to accept the *nawab*'s terms, did not feel that he could force Renault to agree. 'Now that I have granted terms to Mr. Renault, and that he is under my protection,' he said, 'it is contrary to our custom after this to use violence and without it would he ever of his own will and leisure write to desire you to

deliver up his master's property? Weigh the justice of this in your own mind.' Clive did, however, helpfully offer to send troops to seize the French settlements. At the same time, he did not hesitate to accuse the *namah* of failing to carry out the terms of the treaty of February 9. His accusations were quite untrue, a fact which he even admitted himself in a letter of March 29 to Pigot at Madras. The *namah*, he said, had 'already performed almost every article of the treaty; paid Mr. Watts the three lakhs of rupees; delivered up Kasimbazar, and all other factories with the money and goods therein taken. The gentlemen write from thence that little or nothing is wanting.' Any delay in the settling of the accounts had in fact been due to the laziness of the English over submitting proper ones, but Clive could resist no excuse, real or fictitious, for bullying the *namah*.

The situation at Siraj-ud-daula's court was, to say the least, confused. Both the French and British were bribing as many people as they could afford, although Law—who had very little money at his disposal—was only able to buy men whom the British did not particularly want. Many of these, instead of furthering French plans, merely helped to discredit them. The British, with Omichand's help, succeeded in getting better value for their money.

The struggle was too unequal for Law, though he managed to hold his own for three weeks after the fall of Chandernagore. At last, on April 13, he was summoned by the *namah*, who had apparently decided to remove from Murshidabad at least one of the sources of hostility towards him. Watts was present at the meeting and urged Law to surrender on the most honourable terms. It seems probable that the *namah* had intended to arrest Law and hand him over to the British, but the timely arrival of a small force of French soldiers led him to think again. Law was given permission to march off in the direction of Patna, though Watts and his supporters at court tried to force him instead to march southward, where he would probably have been captured by the British. The *namah* promised Law that he would recall him at some future date, but Law knew that the British had triumphed and said: 'Rest assured, my lord *namah*, that this is the last time we shall see each other. Remember my words. We shall never meet again.' Three days later, Watts was able to report that 'the French left their factory and marched through the city today'.

On his journey, Law did in fact receive a letter from Siraj-ud-daula recalling him to the capital. He took it to be a forgery, however, and pressed on towards Patna, where he was well received by the *namah*'s deputy in accordance with his master's instructions—

although the *namab*, at the same time, was assuring the British that he had given instructions for Law to be expelled from the city. It was at this stage that Admiral Watson penned his last letter to the *namab* before withdrawing from their frequently heated correspondence. 'I have already told you,' he wrote, 'and I now repeat it again, that while a Frenchman remains in this kingdom, I will never cease pursuing him . . . I desire you will grant a *dustuck* for the passage of two thousand of our soldiers by land to Patna.'

When the *namab* received Watson's letter, his temper broke and he ordered the English agent out of the *darbar* room, shouting 'I will destroy them and their nation. . . . They are always writing me to deliver up the French . . .' The next day, however, the *namab* received the agent as if nothing had happened and even rewarded him with a dress of honour.

As all his actions had shown, the *namab* remained anxious to avoid an open breach with the English. He had given one reluctant but genuine concession after another. The overriding reason for this was his fear of the Afghan invader, Ahmad Shah Abdali. In February 1757, the Afghans had reached Delhi and sacked the city. They followed this by capturing Agra and Mathura. Though they retired from Delhi early in April, the danger that they might move against Bengal remained as strong as ever. The *namab*'s best troops and most trustworthy commanders were on the borders of Bihar to meet any attack, and all that was left in Siraj-ud-daula's capital were troops under unreliable commanders.

All this was clear to Watts at Murshidabad. The young Englishman, Luke Scrafton, whom Clive had sent ostensibly to assist Watts but in reality to act as Clive's personal agent, reported that the conspiracy to overthrow the *namab* was now a fact, and that he had been approached by Omichand with the proposal that one Yar Latuf Khan might be made *namab*. According to Omichand, Yar Latuf was a man of good character and had the support of the Seths. Raja Manik Chand was also said to support his candidature and to be prepared to put his own troops at the disposal of the English.

Clive now seems seriously to have considered taking the initiative in arranging or at least encouraging a *coup d'état* against Siraj-ud-daula. The Select Committee, still dissatisfied with the reparations received from the *namab*, were perfectly amenable to the idea. They wanted payment for their personal losses, and they wanted it from the *namab*'s treasury. Clive, too, began to consider the cash profit that might come his way. There were said to be Rs 40,000,000 in the

treasury which, if captured, would be counted as a prize of war to be shared out among the victors. The prospect was alluring, and not entirely from the selfish point of view. Taking Bussy's success in the Deccan as an example, there seemed no reason why Bengal, a much richer province, could not be run in the interests of the Company's trade. If the British could control the state, then its surplus revenue might be used to finance Company trade—leaving the whole of the proceeds as profit. That would certainly inspire warmth in the hearts, as well as in the pockets, of the Directors in London. It would also inspire gratitude to the man who had turned an Indian state into a goldmine.

On April 23, 1757, the Select Committee decided that to overthrow Siraj-ud-daula and replace him with a nawab more malleable in English hands was now official policy. Three days later, Clive wrote to Admiral Watson to inform him of the situation. On the same day, Watts wrote that Mir Jafar, supported by two others, was 'ready and willing to join their forces, seize the nabob and put up another person approved of. If you approve of this scheme, which is more feasible than the other [that suggested by Omichand] I wrote about, he [Mir Jafar] requests you will write your proposals, of what money, what land you want, or what treaties you will engage in.'

The *nawab*, too, had written to Clive to inform him that Ahmad Shah was returning to his own country and that there was no longer the threat of an Afghan invasion of Bengal. He therefore would not need to call on the English for assistance. Clive should not, said Siraj-ud-daula, continue his march towards Murshidabad, as this would be in defiance of the treaty; the *nawab* had ordered Mir Jafar to go to Plassey with fifteen thousand men to reinforce Rai Durlabh, who had been camped there for a month. Watts reported that Nand Kumar had told the *nawab* that Clive had said he intended to 'begin my march . . . towards the *nawab* and do you inform him of it'. This was untrue, and it would seem that Nand Kumar—who had perhaps not received enough in bribes to satisfy him—was trying to stir up trouble. Whatever the reason, Watts ordered away a small body of troops Clive had sent to Murshidabad as escort for some bullion. He was sure it would be regarded as provocation, and decided that it would be premature to risk hostilities before the details of the conspiracy were properly arranged. The *nawab*, wrote Watts, 'is very uppish. The three-fourths of his army are his enemies. When the agreement with Mir Jafar is settled, we cannot have a man more powerful. There is none equal to him.' In the meanwhile, Watts

suggested that Clive 'should appear to give up all thought of war and send your people nowhere but keep quiet'.

At this critical moment, the Select Committee decided to step in. Negotiations with Siraj-ud-daula had been left in the hands of Clive and Watson, though Clive was in effect completely responsible. As Watts and Scrafton, who had been sent to Murshidabad by Clive, did not always agree, the Committee now proposed to recall Scrafton. After Clive's strong protest they agreed that he should remain, although Watts was the proper person to handle the Company's affairs at the *nawab's* court.

Clive went down to Calcutta on May 1, and the Committee—after reading Watt's letter of April 26—decided to take up Mir Jafar's offer. The *nawab's* 'dishonesty and insolence', they claimed, 'show that the recently made treaty was concluded by him only to gain time; the absolute certainty of his intention to break the peace, as shown by his intrigues with the French [in other words, Law and Bussy]; the hatred felt for the nabob by everybody makes it probable that there will be a revolution whether we interfere or not, and it would be a mistake not to assist a probable successor and so obtain the exclusion of the French'.

Once more it was a time for diplomacy, dissimulation, and soothing letters to Siraj-ud-daula. Clive wrote that he had sent more than half his force down to Calcutta and was keeping the remainder at Chandernagore only because, 'since your army has almost destroyed it [Calcutta] there is not much room for more soldiers without endangering their lives by sickness. However, further to satisfy you, I shall order down to Calcutta all my field cannon.' In return, Clive delicately suggested that the *nawab* should withdraw his own troops.

By now, however, the *nawab* was past the stage of being soothed. His forces remained at Plassey and he sent money to Law asking him to return to Murshidabad. Law decided not to go. If he had done, it is doubtful whether Clive's forthcoming victory at Plassey would have turned out as decisive as it was to prove to be.

Clive's aim was now to get things moving before the possibility of aid from Bussy became a reality. In pursuit of this, he had to push his own Council—a body of weak and indecisive men—and persuade Watson (who did not wish to be involved) into supporting him.

Watts in Murshidabad still believed that Omichand was on the side of the British. Here he was wrong. The British decision to

support Mir Jafar in preference to Yar Latuf Khan had upset Omichand's plans. Mir Jafar had the Seths' support, and Omichand saw himself relegated to a minor role and unable to gain anything for himself out of the situation. He therefore decided to make his profit out of the *namab* himself, before he was overthrown, and at the same time pay back the British and the Seths for past insults. When the Seths' agent, Ranjit Rai, pressed the *namab* for payment of the sum which had been promised him in return for his part in the negotiations with the British, Omichand suggested that the *namab* could save the money Ranjit Rai was demanding if he appointed Omichand as his agent instead. The *namab* agreed, and declared Ranjit Rai 'out of favour or disgraced'. At the same time, he ordered that Omichand should be paid a large sum of money that the state owed him. Enraged, the Seths insisted to Watts that, in any arrangement they might enter into with Mir Jafar and the British, there must be no place for Omichand.

Before the Seths told Watts of Omichand's intrigues, Clive had written to him to say that Omichand, 'in consideration of his service, should have all his losses made good by an express article of the treaty' with Mir Jafar. Watts now found himself in an awkward predicament. The Seths and their protégé, Mir Jafar, would have nothing more to do with Omichand and his ridiculous demands. Omichand—who had discovered that Watts knew of his, so far, harmless deals with the *namab*—began, however, to have delusions of grandeur. He demanded of Watts that he should receive five per cent of the *namab*'s treasure as his cut when the conspiracy was successful. Since Watts estimated the treasure at forty million pounds sterling (at the then rate of exchange), Omichand was certainly hoping for sizeable rewards. His five per cent would have amounted to two million pounds, an enormous sum in the middle of the eighteenth century. It now seems probable that the size of the *namab*'s treasure was exaggerated, but Watts's figure was certainly believed at the time. Omichand, if disowned by Watts, threatened to betray the whole plot to the *namab*. Whether he would really have done so is quite another matter, but the threat was dangerous enough. Undoubtedly, if Siraj-ud-daula heard of the plot, he would move against the British, probably in alliance with the French.

On May 16, Watts informed Clive of his fears and also of the urgency now involved in the decision to support Mir Jafar. The Indian conspirators were so anxious for immediate support from the

British that Watts was able to send to Calcutta a blank sheet of paper bearing only Mir Jafar's seal, on which the Select Committee were authorized to write their own terms!

Next day, Clive and the Select Committee discussed Omichand's demands. They decided that his conduct in attempting to blackmail them by threatening to reveal the plot to the *namab* deserved punishment rather than payment. Under pressure from Clive, they considered 'how we might deceive Omichand and prevent a discovery of the whole project, which we run the risk of should we hesitate or refuse to insist on the unreasonable gratification he expects and demands, and on the other hand it would be highly improper to stipulate, much more to demand with any obstinacy, such extravagant terms from Mir Jafar for a person who can be of no service in the intended revolution. So on the other it would be dangerous to provoke a man of Omichand's character by seeming to take no care at all of his interests, and slighting his weight and influence, which might prompt him to make a sacrifice of us and ruin our affairs entirely.' For these reasons, the Committee thought it would be necessary to draft 'a double treaty, both to be signed by Mir Jafar and by us; in one of which the article in favour of Omichand is to be inserted, in the other to be left out, and Mir Jafar is to be informed of that which we design to abide by and esteem authentic with our reasons for taking such a step'.

The duplicate treaty has been the subject of comment ever since it was prepared—except at the time. When a parliamentary commission enquired into Clive's activities some years later, it was used against him by his enemies. The morality of it has been condemned by puritan historians and displayed as an example of British perfidy by Indian nationalists. In fact, the only surprising thing in the whole affair was that such a potentially dangerous subterfuge was thought to be necessary, when it would probably have been simpler merely to arrange for Omichand's assassination.

Once the decision had been made, Clive proceeded to put it into effect—and with no half measures. His first act was to send Watts a letter in which he told him to 'flatter Omichand greatly, tell him the admiral, Committee and self are infinitely obliged to him for the pains he has taken to aggrandize the Company's affairs, and that his name will be greater in England than it ever was in India'. So that Omichand's suspicions should not be aroused by too rapid agreement, Watts was also instructed to haggle.

Only one obstacle remained to Clive's plans in regard to Omichand.



For the fictitious treaty to appear genuine, it had to bear Admiral Watson's signature. When the treaty was sent to him, the admiral refused to sign it, although, according to later evidence, he is supposed to have said that the Select Committee 'could do as they pleased'. Clive thereupon instructed one Mr. Lushington to forge the admiral's signature.

The false treaty, written on red paper, was shown to Omichand. The real treaty, to which the admiral was perfectly willing to affix his seal and signature, was drawn up on white paper. During the later parliamentary enquiry, Clive maintained that after the false treaty had been sent to Watson, the admiral 'gave the gentleman who carried it [Lushington] leave to sign his name upon it'. Evidence was also produced which emphatically denied that the admiral had done any such thing.

The truth is probably very simple. Watson, as had been apparent before, was unwilling to involve the king whom he represented in the intrigues of the East India Company's servants. As a naval officer, he felt that he could not *officially* be party to the deception practised on Omichand. As a *private* person, he may have had fewer scruples. Certainly he showed no reluctance in accepting his proportion of the spoils which were to come the way of the British when the *nawab* was overthrown. When Mir Jafar made his 'donation' to the Select Committee, the admiral demanded—in addition to the prize money he was entitled to as senior naval officer—an equal share with other members of the Committee.

While the affair of the forged signature was in progress, Siraj-ud-daula was well aware that something was afoot. His spies had reported, and the French had also informed him, that there was a conspiracy to replace him by Mir Jafar. About May 12, a letter was received in Calcutta, allegedly from the leader of the Marathas, who now dominated central India and controlled the ineffective Mughal emperor at Delhi. The letter offered the British an alliance against the *nawab* and promised the support of 120,000 Maratha cavalry. Furthermore, 'whatever goods and riches you have lost in Bengal,' it said, 'the double of its value shall be restored by me. Do not on any account make peace with the nabob. In a few days my forces shall enter Bengal, and the trade of that province shall be entirely yours. The French shall not remain in Bengal. Your forces shall keep them out by sea, mine by land.' The British took this letter to be a forgery, and Clive was convinced that the messenger—a man of no consequence—was a 'spy sent by the nabob to discover our sentiments



that, after the overthrow of Siraj-ud-daula, he would be appointed principal agent of the British at the capital, that Omichand consented to leave. On the way to Calcutta, Omichand disappeared on a visit to Rai Durlabh, then encamped at Plassey. When he returned, he and Scrafton continued the journey, arriving at Calcutta on June 8.

It was now obvious that Omichand's suspicions of British intentions had been aroused, for he bribed the Select Committee's native interpreter to inform him 'if any deceit to his detriment' should appear in the treaty with Mir Jafar when it was translated into Persian, the customary language of diplomacy at that time.

The terms of the treaty which had finally been sent to Mir Jafar were as follows:

- 1 Mir Jafar to confirm all the grants and privileges allowed by Siraj-ud-daula;
- 2 Mir Jafar to enter into an offensive and defensive alliance with the British;
- 3 All Frenchmen in Bengal with their factories and goods to be delivered up to the British. The French never to be permitted to resettle in the three provinces;
- 4 The Company to receive 100 *lakhs* [one *lakh* = 100,000] for the loss sustained by the destruction of Calcutta and for the expenses of the war;
- 5 The European inhabitants of Calcutta to receive 50 *lakhs* of rupees for their losses at the capture of that town;
- 6 The Hindus to receive 20 *lakhs* on the same account;
- 7 The Armenians 7 *lakhs*;
- 8 Omichand 20 *lakhs*;
- 9 The Company to be put in possession of all the land within the Calcutta Ditch and 600 yards all round;
- 10 The Company to receive the *zamindari* [landlord's rights] of the country south of Calcutta between the river and the salt lakes as far as Kalpi;
- 11 The *namab* to pay the extraordinary expenses of the British troops when required by him for his own defence;
- 12 The government not to erect fortifications on the river below Hugli;
- 13 The articles to be complied with within thirty days of Mir Jafar's being acknowledged *namab*;
- 14 The Company to assist Mir Jafar against all enemies as long as he complies with the treaty.

When Rai Durlabh arrived at Murshidabad on June 2, it was obvious from his attitude that Omichand had made him suspicious of the British. Watts, indeed, began to feel that all the conspirators were expendable. He wrote to Clive: 'If you think you are strong enough, I am of the opinion we had better depend on ourselves and enter into no contract or have any connection with such a set of shuffling, lying, spiritless wretches.' Rai Durlabh, however, was probably only shocked at the amount of money Mir Jafar was expected to pay out if he succeeded. As Rai Durlabh was the *nawab's* treasurer, he must have known that there was not as much in the treasury as the British seemed to think. It seems likely that Mir Jafar induced him to agree to the treaty on the assumption that, by the time the British discovered how little money there actually was, Mir Jafar would be safely on the throne. On the principle of first things first, especially when any more lagging might either set the conspiracy off prematurely or end it altogether, Rai Durlabh told Watts that Mir Jafar would sign the treaty. As Mir Jafar was being kept under surveillance by the *nawab's* spies, Watts had himself carried to his mansion in a palanquin normally used to transport women—and the treaty was signed in the women's quarters.

Though the narab did not know of the party, he was determined to arrest Mir Jafar. The men he sent to carry out the arrest, however, were taken by Mir Jafar's retainers, who then sent them to the narab. Instead of punishing a party known to carry out the order, the narab commended himself for carrying out the order with the order mand. This commended Mir Jafar's order of the time as the order time proving that the narab was not to be trusted and that in the first instance, the commutation was made as the

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greyhounds, having previously left directions with their servants to provide a supper, telling them they should return and entertain the Dutch that evening. It was dark before they arrived at Daudpur, though they travelled with all possible expedition. On the plain near that place was encamped Rai Durlabh, an officer of the nabob's with a very large force. Here they were exposed to imminent danger, falling unawares on the outposted guards, but the darkness of the night favoured their escape. By striking off into the plain and taking a circuit of the whole camp they regained the road and arrived about one o'clock in the morning at Augurdip, where a second misfortune threatened their destruction. They unexpectedly found themselves in the midst of a body of horse, which had been stationed there to prevent the passing or repassing down or up the country of any Europeans. The first notice they had of this danger was the neighing and kicking of the horses about; their riders luckily were asleep. At this place they quitted their horses, and embarking on two open boats which they had the good fortune to seize, proceeded down the river.' They finally met Clive at Khulna two days later.

In Murshidabad, the *nawab* heard of Watts's flight almost as soon as it took place and immediately wrote to the Frenchman, Law, to come to his aid. But Law wisely decided to stay where he was. Baseless rumours were still circulating to the effect that Bussy was planning to enter Bengal, and the possibility of French intervention remained to worry the British and give hope to the *nawab*. Though some of the *nawab's* advisers pressed him once again to arrest Mir Jafar, Siraj-ud-daula could no longer trust his own troops, whose pay was in arrears and who seemed ripe for desertion. Instead, he attempted to make Mir Jafar agree to a reconciliation. Mir Jafar described the *nawab's* efforts in a letter to Omar Beg, who was with the British: 'The guns and fire arrows were all ready against me, and the people were in arms day and night. Mr. Watts's news was known early on Monday. This startled the nabob; he thought it absolutely necessary I should be soothed; he came to me himself. On Thursday eve the Hugli letter arrived that they were marched. I was to be with him. On three conditions I consented to it. One, that I would not enter into his service; secondly, I would not visit him; lastly, I would not take post in the army. I sent him word that if he agreed to these terms I was ready. As he wanted me, he consented. But I took this writing from all the commanders of the army and artillery: "that when they had conquered the English they should be bound to see me and my family safe wherever I chose to go".'

The *nawab* left Murshidabad and moved slowly to join his army at Plassey. Law had not joined him, but with the *nawab* was a small party of Europeans—thirty or forty in number—under St. Fraix, who were to handle the artillery. St. Fraix was given permission to burn the British factory at Kasimbazar.

The 'nice and important game that was . . . played with the late nabob', as Clive was later to describe the conspiracy, was coming to its climax. What the climax would be was still not certain. As Clive moved up river to meet the *nawab*, he wrote to the governor of Hugli: 'Do not interfere but wait the event, whether our differences with the *nawab* are to be settled in an amicable manner or by a battle.' Even at this late stage nothing was really sure. The conspiracy was ripe. Watts had done everything he could to ensure its success. The treaty with Mir Jafar was in Clive's hands. The blue-prints for treachery had been drawn up and agreed upon. But both Clive and Watts knew their India well enough to be sure that nothing was sure, and that treachery had two edges. The British were involved in a gamble of such colossal proportions that it seems probable that most of them did not even realize the odds.

### Chapter XIII

## THE BATTLE AT PLASSEY

ADMIRAL WATSON AT least understood the dangers of the policy which Clive, with the support of the Select Committee, had been trying to carry out, dangers that arose as soon as it progressed from intrigue to action. When Clive wrote to him on May 28 asking him for men and ships, the admiral warned him that 'you cannot be too cautious to prevent a false step being taken, which might be of very fatal consequences to our affairs'. Watson was right to fear the consequences. If it came to a clash, and if treachery had not sufficiently undermined the *nawab's* forces, Clive might be defeated. Watson knew that it would not only be a simple defeat in Bengal, followed probably by the return of the French—and this time without any possibility of neutrality. Chandernagore had seen to that. Defeat would also prevent Clive from returning to the south, where the threat to Madras remained as serious as ever. The loss of Bengal might also mean the loss of Madras. In effect, the whole of the Company's future in India rested on the results of Clive's gamble.

Even the weather seemed to be ranged against the British. It was now the hottest time of the year and, what was worse, the rainy season was imminent. It was a time not only of heat and disease, but one in which the contours of the land and the rivers were changed too. Choked with rain, the river expanded, and the low-lying land became flooded. It was undoubtedly the worst time in the whole of the Bengal year to start a campaign. But it was hardly likely that a simmering conspiracy could be kept in being if it had to wait for the onset of the cold weather in October.

Clive was ready to move by June 10 and on that day sent in a request for the presence of the sailors as well as for a twenty-gun ship to lie off Hugli and prevent the *nawab's* deputy there from interfering with the passage of troops. Two days later, 150 sailors and the troops from Calcutta crossed the river and made their way to join Clive at Chandernagore. Except for a few invalids and some artillerymen to man the guns on the ramparts, Calcutta was left undefended.

The force reached Chandernagore the same evening, and on the following day Clive marched off to confront the *namah*, leaving a hundred seamen to garrison the town. The expedition was weak. Clive's force consisted of 613 European infantry, about a hundred *topasses* (Eurasian soldiers), and 171 artillerymen including fifty sailors and seven midshipmen under the command of Lieutenant Hayter. The native infantry numbered 2,100, some from Madras and others from Bengal and Bombay. The artillery consisted of ten field-pieces and two small howitzers. The European infantry was the 39th Foot. The Europeans travelled up river by boat, the native infantry marched along the right bank of the river.

On June 13, Clive sent his ultimatum to the *namah*. It was cleverly phrased so as to appear to leave the door open for negotiation. There were, of course, threats—in the form of a catalogue of the *namah*'s misdeeds and with emphasis on his letters to Bussy and Law. Clive also alleged that he was marching to Kasimbazar only, so that from there he might 'put our disputes to arbitration before Jagat Seth, Raja Mohan Lal, Mir Jafar, Rai Durlabh, Mir Madan and the rest of your great men, and if it shall appear that I have deviated from the treaty I bind myself to give up all my demands. But if it should appear Your Excellency has deviated from it, I shall demand satisfaction for all our losses, and all the charges of the navy and army.' To this the *namah* replied: 'Almost everything in conformity to the treaty has been delivered back to Mr. Watts; very little only remained. The affairs also with Manik Chand were settling as fast as could be. Notwithstanding this Mr. Watts and the rest of the Council at Kasimbazar, going to the gardens on the pretence of a party of pleasure, have retired from thence in the night, which appears to be done with a very deceitful design and intention to break the treaty. For certainly without your orders and directions Mr. Watts would never have acted in this manner. It was the consideration that something of this kind was contriving that hindered me from recalling the army from Plassey, for I know some trick was intended. I thank God, however, the treaty has not been broken on my part, and as it was so solemnly sworn to before God and His Prophet He will doubtless punish him who has first violated it.'

Clive's force reached Khulna, some fifteen miles from Hugli, on June 14, and was joined there by Watts and his two colleagues. By the 17th, Clive had reached Patli where he ordered Eyre Coote, who had been appointed to the rank of major the day before, 'to possess himself of Kutwa, town and fort about fourteen miles distant'. To



carry out this order, Coote was given 200 Europeans, 500 sepoy and two field-pieces. Kutwa was an important objective, for its fort—an earthen fortification about a mile in circumference, and with eight round towers—commanded the road to Murshidabad as well as the river. It also contained a large store of grain.

Coote arrived outside the fort on June 18 and, as he was unable to bring his guns up the river and also had reason to believe that the *nawab's* commander would surrender without a fight, sent a native officer under a flag of truce to demand that the fort be handed over. Though he had already been fired upon from the fort, Coote recorded that 'I had resolved not to return it . . . until I received his [the governor's] answer with regard to giving up the place, which if he refused I would immediately storm and give no quarter'. The governor replied that he was 'resolved to defend it to the last' and Coote ordered his sepoy to make a mock attack on the front of the fort while the British forces crossed the river to take it in the rear. As they approached, the defenders deserted the fort.

The next day, Clive arrived at Kutwa with the main force, to be met by a torrential downpour of rain. The troops were forced to take shelter in the houses and huts of the native town.

It was now a time for extreme caution. Clive and his tiny force were a hundred miles from their base at Calcutta and forty miles from Murshidabad. Between them and the capital lay Plassey, where Clive expected to meet up with the *nawab*. His spies, as usual, were bringing in contradictory information, and without Watts at the *nawab's* court he was deprived of trustworthy news as to the state of the conspiracy and the conspirators. From Mir Jafar he had heard nothing since a rather ambiguous letter on June 16. It seemed possible that Mir Jafar—who was already a traitor to the *nawab*—might be preparing to sell Clive out too, even if only by remaining inactive.

When he arrived at Kutwa, Clive wrote again to Mir Jafar. 'It gives me great concern,' he complained, 'that in an affair of so great consequence to yourself in particular that you do not exert yourself more. So long as I have been on my march you have not yet given me the least information what measures it is necessary for me to take, nor do I know what is going forward at Murshidabad. Surely it is in your power to send me news daily; it must be more difficult for me to procure trusty messengers than you; however, the bearer of this is a sensible intelligent man, in whom I have great confidence. Let me know your sentiments freely by him. I shall wait here till I have proper intelligence to proceed. I think it absolutely necessary that

you should join my army as soon as possible. Consider the nabob will increase in strength daily. Come over to me at Plassey or any other place you judge proper, with what force you have. Even a thousand horse will be sufficient, and I will engage to march immediately with you to Murshidabad. I prefer conquering by open force.'

At the same time, Clive wrote to the Select Committee to say that he would not move until Mir Jafar joined him. He was prepared to remain at Kutwa throughout the rainy season, if necessary, and to attempt to force the *nawab* into giving in and coming to terms. Clive suggested that, if this did not happen, the British might ally themselves with the Marathas, or even with the *nawab* of Oudh. Clive did not receive the Committee's reply until after the battle of Plassey had taken place, but his response to it gives some indication of the general tenor of the letter. Its contents, said Clive, were 'so indefinite and . . . contradictory that I can put no other construction on it than an attempt to clear yourselves at my expense, had this expedition miscarried'.

Clive remained doubtful about the risk of attacking the *nawab* without assistance from Mir Jafar. On June 21, he called a council of war and put to it the following proposition: 'Whether in our present situation without assistance and on our own bottom it would be prudent to attack the nabob, or whether we should wait till joined by some country power [the Marathas or the *nawab* of Oudh].' It seemed, Clive argued, that the best they could expect from Mir Jafar was neutrality. The *nawab*'s army, according to his spies, numbered about 50,000 men, and Law with a body of Frenchmen was only about three days' march away. Clive had no cavalry—in fact, he had written on the 20th to the raja of Birbhum (a small semi-independent ruler on the borders of Bengal) asking him to join the British and to send two or three hundred cavalry to help them. On the same evening a letter, sewn up in a slipper, had arrived from Mir Jafar. 'Tomorrow, the day of the Eade [Id-ul-fitr, a Muslim festival],' he wrote, 'by the blessing of God I shall march. I shall have my tent fixed to the right or left of the army. I have hitherto been afraid to send you intelligence. After I am arrived in the army mutual intelligence will be easier, but here the nabob has fixed *chokeys* [guards] on all the roads. Your letters come too open to me; I hope that till our affairs are publicly declared you will be very careful.'

This letter was placed before the council of war, together with the information that Mir Jafar and the *nawab* had apparently been

reconciled. When it came to a vote, Clive, Kilpatrick and ten others wanted a delay. Eyre Coote, Alexander Grant and five others demanded an immediate attack. Coote, whose Indian experience was small, by no means fully understood the mixture of threat and diplomacy in which Clive was still dealing. He also completely misunderstood his commander's proposition.

One of Coote's statements was that 'we should come to an immediate action; or, if that was thought entirely impracticable, that we should return to Calcutta; the consequence of which must be our own disgrace, and the inevitable destruction of the Company's affairs'. Clive had no intention of withdrawing to Calcutta. He merely counselled waiting at Kutwa—which, as it controlled water communications with Calcutta, could be supplied from there if necessary—until Mir Jafar's position was made clear. Coote, in his enthusiasm, had in fact misunderstood the question, which was simply whether or not the British should move without genuine and unequivocal assurances of support from Mir Jafar. But his point, a perfectly reasonable one in the circumstances, upset Clive, who was plagued with doubts and constantly irritated by his officers. Before the council had even considered Clive's question, a King's officer, Lieutenant Hayter, had demanded that he take precedence over the Company's captains. When he was told that he could not, he refused to vote and took no part in the council's deliberations.

After the council of war, Clive 'retired into an adjoining grove, where he remained near an hour in meditation which convinced him of the absurdity of stopping where he was; and acting now entirely from himself, he gave orders, on his return to his quarters, that the army cross the river the next morning'. So said Robert Orme, and Coote confirmed that Clive reached his decision 'about an hour after the council broke up' and informed him that he intended to march the next morning. Clive had, in fact, reached the point of no return. The bazaars of Bengal were alive with rumours of his activities, and if action were not taken, if any sign of weakness was apparent, Mir Jafar and his fellow conspirators would be quick to reach an accommodation with the *nawab*.

It was a situation brimming with all the factors that, for Clive, inevitably led to a feeling of despair and a failure of nerve. The retirement to the grove—and there seems no doubt that it occurred—was a retirement into the dark place where Clive fought with the shadows of his own mind. In his later evidence before the parliamentary commission, he did not categorically deny telling Coote that he

had decided to move, but suggested that it was unlikely in view of the fact that his force did not march off until the evening of the 22nd. The clue to Clive's disquiet and indecision can be found in the last sentence of his letter to the Select Committee, a body of men for whom he had little but contempt. 'I beg,' he said, 'you will let me have your sentiments how I ought to act at this critical juncture.' These were hardly the words of a man who was absolutely sure of himself.

Fortunately, on the afternoon of the 22nd, at about three o'clock, a letter arrived from Mir Jafar. This informed Clive that Mir Jafar had left Murshidabad and was gathering his retainers together. The *nawab* and his army were now at Muncarra, a village about six miles to the south of Kasimbazar, and Mir Jafar reported that Siraj-ud-daula intended to entrench there. 'Therefore the sooner you march to fall upon him the better,' urged Mir Jafar, 'before his design can take place. As yet you are now only designing, but it is not now proper to be indolent. When you come near I shall then be able to join you. If you could send two or three hundred good fighting men the upper road towards Kasimbazar, the nabob's army would of themselves retreat. Then the battle will have no difficulty. When I am arrived near the army I will send you privately all the intelligence. Let me have previous notice of the time you intend to fight.' This letter contained no more specific assurances that Mir Jafar intended to come over to the British than his earlier ones had done, but Clive took it at its face value. Immediately, his depression lifted, and he replied to Mir Jafar: 'I am determined to risk everything on your account, though you will not exert yourself. I shall be on the other side of the river this evening. If you will join me at Plassey, I will march halfway to meet you, then the whole nabob's army will I know fight for you. Give me [leave] to call to your mind how much your own glory and safety depends upon it. Be assured if you do this you will be *subah* of these provinces, but if you cannot go even this length to assist us I call God to witness the fault is not mine, and I must desire your consent for concluding a peace with the nabob, and what has passed between us will never be known. What can I say more than that I am as desirous of your success and welfare as my own.'

Two hours after receiving Mir Jafar's letter, Clive and his little force crossed the river, and an hour after that Clive despatched a further message to Mir Jafar. 'I am come to a resolution to proceed immediately to Plassey,' he wrote, and added 'I am impatient for an answer to my letter by a trusty man.'

The advance continued until 'about twelve at night'. After marching, in very heavy rain, through the flooded fields that lined the river banks, the first part of the British force arrived at Plassey. The rearguard did not bivouac until about three in the morning. From Mir Jafar's letter, Clive had expected the *nawab* still to be encamped at Muncarra, but when he arrived at Plassey he discovered that 6,000 of the *nawab*'s troops were within three miles of him. Clive ordered 200 Europeans and 300 sepoys, with two field-pieces, to occupy Plassey House and other points around Plassey grove. Though the site of the battlefield is so much changed today that none of the features described by eyewitnesses can be properly identified, in 1757 the *nawab* had a hunting-box on the bank of the river. This, which the British called Plassey House, was of substantial size, well built in brick, and surrounded by a high wall. Clive made it his headquarters. About fifty yards from the river was a grove of mango trees about 800 yards long and 300 wide. The trees were planted in regular rows. Protected by a mud bank and a ditch, the main body of Clive's force bivouacked for the rest of the night.

The morning of June 23 found Clive with no further news from Mir Jafar. According to Orme, at sunrise Clive 'went with another person upon the terrace of the hunting-house, from whence having contemplated the enemy's array, he was surprised at their numerous, splendid and martial appearance. His companion asked him what he thought would be the event; to which he replied, "We must make the best fight we can during the day and at night sling our muskets over our shoulders and march back to Calcutta". Most of the officers were as doubtful of success as himself, but the common soldiery, being mostly tried men who had served under Major [Stringer] Lawrence on the plains of Trichinopoly, maintained the blunt spirit of Englishmen, and saw nothing in the pomp or multitude of the *nawab*'s army either to admire or to fear.' There was certainly a multitude and there was certainly pomp. 'What with the number of elephants, all covered with scarlet cloth and embroidery; their horse, with their drawn swords glittering in the sun; their heavy cannon drawn by vast trains of oxen; and their standards flying, they made a most pompous and formidable appearance.'

About a mile to the north of the British position, Siraj-ud-daula lay in his tent surrounded by his army. His force consisted of about 35,000 infantry, mainly untrained, badly armed, and undisciplined. His cavalry was very much better—15,000 men, mostly Pathans from the north-west, excellent horsemen, well mounted, and armed

with swords and long spears. The artillery was even more impressive. It consisted of fifty-three field-pieces, and what made it formidable was the fact that, to direct the native artillerymen, there were forty or fifty Frenchmen under the command of M. de St. Frais, a former member of the Council at Chandernagore. This little band was understandably intent on revenging the defeats which the French had suffered at British hands.

The *nawab* also occupied a strategically strong position behind entrenchments which ran along the river and then extended about 200 yards inland and north-east for three miles. At the angle where the entrenchment turned north, there was a redoubt mounted with cannon. Three hundred yards east of this, and in front of the entrenchment, was a small hill covered with jungle. To the south of it, about 800 yards away in the direction of the grove occupied by the British, was a small artificial lake, and 100 yards farther on a larger one. Both lakes were surrounded by large quantities of earth, some distance from the banks. It was around these two points that the battle was to be fought.

From his position on the roof of Plassey House, Clive could see before him a wide, lush plain. The blue of the sky was broken by the sharp black of the monsoon clouds. As the sun rose high, the *nawab's* army marched out of its entrenchments. It was formed into three divisions—commanded by the three major conspirators, Rai Durlabh, Yar Lutuf Khan, and Mir Jafar. These occupied a crescent line from the small hill to within half a mile of the southern flank of the mango grove, and the divisions led by the two latter commanders soon encircled and outflanked the British force. At the larger of the two lakes, St. Frais, with the French contingent and four of the guns, occupied a position 200 yards from the British. Nearer to the river, two heavy guns were posted under a native officer. In support were the *nawab's* best men. These consisted of about 5,000 cavalry and 7,000 foot under the command of Mir Madan, Siraj-ud-daula's only loyal general.

In face of this impressive multitude, Clive made the dispositions of his little army. He ordered his men to leave the protection of the mango grove and drew them up in a line running from the hunting-box and directly facing the French. In the centre, he placed his European troops flanked on both sides by three six-pounder guns; on their right and left were posted his native troops, split into two equal divisions. About 200 yards in front of the hunting-box were some brick kilns, and there Clive posted a

small force with his remaining guns, two six-pounders and two howitzers.

The two principal protagonists, Clive and Siraj-ud-daula, were now very much in the same emotional position. The *namab* was enveloped in a now palpable conspiracy. He could feel whatever loyalties there had been slipping away. The omens had been taken by his astrologer—and they were menacing. Either the astrologer was very percipient, or he had been bought by the conspirators. Siraj-ud-daula had no faith in his army, as the men had been persuaded to march out of Murshidabad only by a lavish distribution of cash.

Clive, too, was surrounded by doubts. He waited for some communication from Mir Jafar, but none came. There was no reason why he should trust the conspirators, and if they had decided not to support him he was probably lost. The great numbers of the *namab*'s army, however, distorted the true picture to some extent. Even if the conspirators did not remain neutral or come over to the British, there was still a very real chance that Clive might defeat the *namab*'s forces. It had been the experience of both the French and the British in the south—which was where Clive himself had learned the techniques of war—that the vast, unwieldy, and above all undisciplined, armies of native princes were no match for European-led, well-armed bodies of troops a fraction of their size. Native commanders were usually mounted on elephants and formed easy targets for marksmen. When they were killed, panic drove the troops from the field. Basically the most dangerous, indeed the only, part of the *namab*'s army which Clive had to fear, was the artillery manned by the French. It was possible that the British might, of course, be overwhelmed by sheer weight of numbers. There is little wonder that Clive worried about Mir Jafar. At 7 a.m. nothing had come from him. An hour later the battle had begun.

St. Frais and his men opened fire on the British line and, the *namab*'s artillery having been brought up, there was a heavy and continuous barrage. The British, with their light guns, could not hope to keep up the duel. The enemy were being cut down in large numbers but they could afford to lose men. The British most certainly could not. After ten Europeans and twenty sepoys had been killed in the course of thirty minutes, Clive gave the order for his men to 'retire and lie upon their arms within the bank of the grove, fronting the enemy as before and drawn up in the same order. Our howitzer was advanced about halfway to the first lake and our eight guns

properly divided in the intervals, betwixt the battalions and the sepoys but advanced a little distance without the banks of the grove.'

It looked to the enemy as if Clive was in retreat, and the *namab's* artillery moved their guns forward and began to shell the grove. They did great damage to the mango trees, but Clive had made his men squat behind the mud bank and pierce holes in it for the field-pieces to fire through. The British were now protected and casualties diminished. The howitzer near the lake had some effect on the enemy, and one of its salvoes mortally wounded Mir Madan. The enemy cavalry, however, began to form up for an attack on the forward guns and they were accordingly withdrawn.

Midday came, and there had been four hours of battle with no promise of decision. The fire of the *namab's* army gave no indication of faltering, and though casualties were high the numbers seemed as massively overwhelming as ever. Mir Jafar gave no sign to his ostensible allies. At 11 o'clock Clive had called his commanders to a meeting, at which they decided to hold their position until nightfall and to make an attack on the enemy's camp at midnight. It was the only possible decision in the circumstances that applied at that moment, but an hour later something happened to alter the situation. It began to rain. A monsoon consists of many, extremely heavy showers, and at noon on June 23, 1757 the thunder rolled alarmingly and the heavens opened on the battlefield. The British were prepared for it. Swiftly they covered their ammunition with tarpaulins. The *namab's* troops, however, were less alert and their ammunition was soon soaked and useless. 'We had some apprehension,' wrote one of Clive's officers, 'that the enemy would take advantage of this opportunity [the rain] and make a push with their horse, but our guns continuing to play very briskly prevented any such motion. The enemy's guns during the rain, which lasted half an hour, did not fire a shot.'

About 3 p.m. the British saw the enemy begin to retire 'without confusion to their old camp, their artillery marching first'. At about the same time, however, a large body of the *namab's* troops was observed apparently heading in the direction of Plassey village, about a mile to the south of the British position. This village commanded the river passage, and Clive's officers concluded that the troops were intending to move up river with the object of attacking the British boats. They were kept on the move by artillery fire, and it later transpired that this contingent of the enemy was in fact the division commanded by Mir Jafar.



Clive, soaked to the skin, descended from his viewpoint on the roof of Plassey House to change into drier clothes. He left orders with Major Kilpatrick that any new movement on the enemy's part was to be reported to him immediately, but soon after was surprised and furious to learn that, without his authority, a British detachment with guns in support had moved off after the enemy in the direction of the large lake. Clive hurried off in pursuit and caught up with the detachment just as it was nearing the position formerly held by St. Fraix and the French. In command was Kilpatrick himself, an old and respected comrade. Clive, in a not unjustified outburst of temper, 'first ordered him under arrest for such unmilitary conduct, but was pacified on receiving an apology'. Ordering Kilpatrick back to the grove, Clive took command.

Clive now decided that to retire after Kilpatrick's sortie would stimulate the enemy into renewing their attack. He therefore sent back for another detachment which soon arrived under the leadership of Eyre Coote. Reinforced, Clive ordered his European grenadiers and a company of sepoys to take up their position along a bank near to the enemy line. This manoeuvre was carried out under a sharp barrage of musket fire from the hill, which was answered by the British gun at the lake. Clive hoped to draw the *nawab's* men out of their entrenchment, and he succeeded. They poured out to meet him, although 'in attempting to bring out their cannon they were so much galled by our artillery that they could not effect it, notwithstanding they made several attempts'. Despite heavy fire from the British guns, the *nawab's* cavalry prepared to charge. Clive, however, had to countermand his order for reinforcements to be brought up from the grove when it appeared that a large body of enemy horse was preparing to attack the British position there. Casualties among Siraj-ud-daula's forces were high, and among the dead were four of his principal officers. But still the enemy came on.

Under the hail of British fire the enemy at last began to break up. Even their elephants, it was observed, 'grew very unruly'. It was Clive's opportunity. He sent Eyre Coote to storm the little hill and another party to assault the redoubt held by St. Fraix and his men. Coote was successful, and at the same instant the redoubt was also taken, 'though the latter was defended by forty Frenchmen and two pieces of cannon'. The redoubt was, in fact, easy to capture since the French had already received orders from the *nawab* to retire.

In Siraj-ud-daula's camp all was confusion. Mir Madan, mortally wounded by the British guns, had been carried into the *nawab's*

own tent and had died there. After the death of his only loyal commander, Siraj-ud-daula knew that all was virtually over. But despite the certainty that Mir Jafar had betrayed him, he sent repeated messages to him to come to his tent. Finally, closely guarded by a strong escort, Mir Jafar arrived. Their meeting was described by Ghulam Husain. 'Siraj-ud-daula spoke to him in the humblest strain, and at last descended to the lowest supplication; he even took his turban from off his head (at least this was the report) and placed it before the general; to whom he addressed these very words: "I now repent of what I have done; and availing myself of those ties of consanguinity which subsist between us, as well as of those rights which my grandfather, Alivardi Khan, has doubtless acquired upon your gratitude, I look up to you, as to the only representative of that venerable personage; and hope therefore, that, forgetting my past trespasses, you shall henceforth behave as becomes a Scyd, a man united in blood to me, and a man of sentiments, who conserves a grateful remembrance of all the benefits he has received from my family; I recommend myself to you; take care of the conservation of my honour and life."

'Mir Jafar coldly replied that the day was now drawing to its end; and that there remained no time for an attack; "send a counter order to the troops that are advancing," said he; "recall those engaged; and tomorrow, with the blessing of God, I will join all the troops together, and provide for the engagement." Siraj-ud-daula observed, that they might be attacked by the enemy in the night; this also the general took upon himself to provide against, and he promised that the enemy would not form a night attack.'

Mir Jafar then returned to his own force and promptly sent a message to Clive, while Siraj-ud-daula called in another of the conspirators, Rai Durlabh, to ask for *his* advice. The advice was the same—the *nawab* should withdraw his troops into the entrenchment.

Siraj-ud-daula gave in. Orders to withdraw were sent to his favourite, Mohan Lal, who now commanded in place of Mir Madan. At first he refused to obey but, after receiving an imploring message from the *nawab*, finally began to retire his men.

This was the movement which inspired Kilpatrick to action, and when the *nawab* heard that the British were actually attacking he mounted a fast-riding camel and retreated in the direction of Murshidabad. By 5 p.m. the British were victorious. Shattered by the defection of the conspirators as well as by the attack itself, the

*namab*'s army retired in a rout. When the British entered the entrenchment, they found masses of abandoned baggage, stores, and cattle, scattered about.

The British pursued the fleeing army for about six miles and captured five pieces of artillery. But without cavalry they could go no further. At Daudpur Clive halted and was joined by Kilpatrick and the remainder of the force. The battle of Plassey was over.

The same evening, Clive wrote to 'Charles Watson and the Gentlemen of the Committee of Fort William'. His report was brief and to the point: 'Gentlemen—This morning at one o'clock we arrived at Plassey grove and early in the morning the nabob's whole army appeared in sight and cannonaded us for several hours, and about noon returned to a very strong camp in sight, lately Rai Durlabh's, upon which we advanced and stormed the nabob's camp, which we have with all his cannon, and pursued him six miles, being now at Daudpur and shall proceed for Murshidabad tomorrow. Mir Jafar, Rai Durlabh and Yar Latuf Khan gave us no other assistance than standing neutral. They are with me with a large force. Mir Madan and five hundred horse are killed and three elephants. Our loss is trifling, not above twenty Europeans killed and wounded.'

In the eyes of the conspirators, the battle was won when the frightened *namab* fled from the field. Soon after, at 5 p.m. when Clive *knew* that he had won, he received a letter from Mir Jafar explaining his unwillingness to declare himself before the battle. The *namab*, he claimed, had made him swear upon the Koran and he felt he could not break his pledge. It was a feeble excuse, particularly coming from a man who had not allowed previous oaths on the Koran to prevent him from becoming deeply embroiled in the conspiracy. Later in the evening, Clive received a further message from Mir Jafar. 'I congratulate you', it said, 'on executing your design. Mirza Omar Beg, or Mr. Watts, or Kwaja Petrus, send one of them to me. I am here on the banks of the lake agreeable to your desire.'

Next morning, the 24th, Clive sent Omar Beg and Scrafton to bring Mir Jafar to Daudpur, a few miles north of Plassey. He came, accompanied by his son and suspecting, not unreasonably, that Clive might give him a cold reception. When he arrived at the camp and 'the guards drew out to receive him as he passed, he started as if he thought it was all over with him; nor did his countenance brighten up till the colonel embraced him and saluted him [*namab*] of the three provinces'. Clive advised Mir Jafar to proceed to the capital

immediately to prevent it from being plundered, and Mir Jafar set off at once followed, the same evening, by Clive.

Reaching Mandipur near Kasimbazar the next day, Clive remained there until the 27th when the Seths warned him that there was a plot to assassinate him as he arrived in Murshidabad. It was not until the 29th, escorted by 200 Europeans and 300 sepoy, that Clive entered the capital and made his way to one of the palaces.

In Murshidabad, he found awaiting him gifts from the Jagat Seth and other rich men of the city. These he refused, telling them that all he wanted from them was their 'assistance in settling the government'. That afternoon, Clive went in state to the royal palace where Mir Jafar and 'all the rajas and all the great men of the court were waiting for him'.

In the throne room, Mir Jafar refused to take his seat. So Clive handed him to it, and then, 'in compliance with the custom of the country, made his submission to him as *subah* [*namab*] by presenting him with a few pieces of gold'. The revolution, engineered by Watts and fought for and won by Clive in the grove of mango trees at Plassey, was complete. Or so it seemed.



PART THREE

*FOUNDING AN EMPIRE*



## Chapter XIV

### THIS GREAT REVOLUTION

‘CONSIDER THE situation in which the victory at Plassey had placed me,’ remarked Clive in 1772 to a committee of the British parliament. ‘A great prince was dependent on my pleasure; an opulent city lay at my mercy; its richest bankers bid against each other for my smiles; I walked through vaults which were thrown open to me alone, piled on either hand with gold and jewels. Mr. Chairman,’ Clive added, ‘at this moment I stand astonished at my own moderation!’ He may have been perfectly serious when he uttered that famous sentence, and, certainly, he might have made even more money than he did if he had been prepared to accept ‘presents’ from lesser men than the *namah*. During the days immediately following Plassey, however, he was astonished not so much at the moderation of his demands as at the sad discovery that the treasure of Murshidabad amounted to a great deal less than everyone had expected.

Before Clive entered the city, Watts and Walsh had been sent to ensure that the treasure did not disappear before the reckoning had been paid. They were both angry and disappointed when Rai Durlabh, ‘with his whole stock of Gentue [Hindu] rhetoric, endeavoured to persuade us that the treasurer had been examined and it appeared that there could not be above one crore and forty lakhs [14,000,000] in the treasury’. This was a mere nothing compared with some of the estimates; indeed, it was not even enough to meet the sums stipulated in the treaty with the English. Watts did not trust Rai Durlabh. Clive, he suggested, ought to interrogate Omichand, who had alleged that he knew places in the city where treasure had been stored.

Clive does not appear to have taken Watts’s advice, and it was soon accepted that the treasury contained less than had been anticipated. It seems unlikely that Omichand did in fact know of secret treasure-stores. If he had done, he would scarcely have kept the knowledge to himself, since he hoped to be awarded five per cent of the treasure in



accordance with the terms of the forged treaty—about which he had not yet been disillusioned. The contemporary historian, Ghulam Husain Khan, on the other hand, records that there really was a secret strongroom, whose existence was not disclosed to the English.

After Clive had handed the new *nawab* to his throne, he went to the house of the Jagat Seth in order to discuss payment of the sums due to the Company and to those who had placed Mir Jafar on the throne. After a long discussion, it was agreed that half the sum promised to the British would be paid immediately—two thirds in cash and the remainder in jewels and plate—and the other half spread over three years, and disbursed in equal annual instalments.

The convoy of boats bearing the half-payment made its way down the Hugli escorted by the British fleet 'with drums beating and colours flying'. The French and Dutch, whose settlements they passed, were witness to 'a scene far different from what they had beheld the year before, when the nabob's fleet and army passed them, with the captive English and all the wealth and plunder of Calcutta'.

Everyone did very well out of Clive's success. Clive's own share amounted to £234,000, and members of Council made between £50,000 and £8,000 each. The army and navy shared £400,000. Rai Durlabh, too, profited to the extent of five per cent of Siraj-ud-daula's treasure. It was only Omichand who was to find his hopes unsatisfied.

Omichand had accompanied Clive and the others to the meeting at the Jagat Seth's house, but he had not been allowed to take part in, or even overhear, the discussions that went on there. When the conference came to an end, Clive decided that it was time to break the news of the forged treaty to him, and Scrafton told him: 'Omichand, the red paper is a trick; you are to have nothing.' According to Orme, 'these words overpowered him like a blast of sulphur; he sank back fainting, and would have fallen to the ground had not one of his attendants caught him in his arms'. Orme went on to say that Omichand lapsed into a 'state of imbecility', but though this would have provided a fittingly picturesque conclusion to the whole bizarre episode, it does not seem to have been true. Omichand remained healthy enough to embark on further intrigues, which he refused to give up even though Clive was prepared to restore his contract for supplying saltpetre. Clive therefore 'recommended to him a visit of devotion to Malda'; in other words, he suggested that Omichand go on a pilgrimage for the good of his soul and the sake of the Company.





CLIVE RECEIVING THE 'DIWANI' OF BENGAL FROM SHAH ALAM

With Omichand out of the way, all that remained of the unfinished business immediately concerned with the conspiracy was the original cause of it. Siraj-ud-daula was still a fugitive. It seemed unlikely that he posed any real threat to the new ruler, but it was certainly a possibility that he might become a figurehead for other men's plans. The French were still not entirely out of the reckoning. Law was around somewhere, with French troops, and there was the ever-present threat that Bussy might intervene.

The problem of the deposed *namab* was soon settled, however. After leaving Plassey, Siraj-ud-daula had arrived in Murshidabad to find that none of the many noblemen in the city would give him aid. He spent June 24 'lavishing considerable sums among his troops to engage them in another battle'. But no one was prepared to fight. Siraj-ud-daula asked his remaining chief officers for advice. 'Some advised him to deliver himself up to the colonel [Clive], against whom he could have no hope of success, having been twice defeated by him.' But to Siraj-ud-daula, surrounded by conspiracy, such advice was nothing short of treason. About midnight, news arrived that Mir Jafar had entered the city. Siraj-ud-daula put his consort, Lutf-un-nisa, and a number of his favourite women 'into covered coaches and covered chairs, loaded them with as much gold and as many jewels as they could contain, and taking with him a number of elephants, with his best baggage and furniture, he quitted his palace about three in the morning and fled'.

Siraj-ud-daula had hoped to meet with Jean Law, whom he believed to be coming to his aid with a small body of men. Instead of taking the direct route to Rajmahal, however, Siraj-ud-daula decided to travel by river. He and his party arrived opposite Rajmahal on June 30, after a hard journey upstream of seventy miles. When they landed, they were so hungry that they made their way to the cell of a Muslim holy man named Dana Shah, and begged some food. He received them courteously and began to prepare a meal for them, a dish of rice cooked with butter and *dhal* and shredded onion. At first Dana Shah took Siraj-ud-daula for just another hungry traveller, since he had 'disguised himself in mean attire'. But the disguise was not complete, and Dana Shah noticed that his guest was wearing 'very rich slippers'. Suspicious, he questioned the boatman, who told him the truth. Dana Shah, whom Siraj-ud-daula 'had either disobliged or oppressed in the days of his full power rejoiced at this fair opportunity of glutting his resentment and enjoyed his revenge'. A message was sent to Mir Kasim, who was governor of Rajmahal

and brother-in-law to Mir Jafar, while the holy man kept his visitor occupied. Soon the governor arrived, accompanied by Mir Daud, and Siraj-ud-daula was taken prisoner and sent under strong guard back to Murshidabad. Lutf-un-nisa was left behind with Mir Kasim, who 'engaged her, partly by threats and partly by promises, to disclose where was her casket of jewels; and this casket, the value of which could not be computed but by *lakhs*, fell in his hands of course. Mir Daud, on this example, laid his hands upon the other ladies and seized whatever he could come at; so that the people with them, on seeing how matters went, made haste to seize whatever was of their conveniency'.

Jean Law arrived at Rajmahal only an hour or so after Siraj-ud-daula had been taken away, and retreated again hurriedly in case he should be pursued by the British. The *namab* was left to his fate. Law reconciled himself to the situation with the thought that Siraj-ud-daula 'would have been a burden to us rather than an advantage'. In this he was undoubtedly right.

On July 2, Siraj-ud-daula was paraded through his former capital like a dangerous criminal. 'He was in so wretched a condition, that the people of God, who saw him in that wretchedness, and remembered the delicacy, the glory, and the care and pomp in which he had been bred from his very infancy, forgot at once the ferocity of his temper, and the shameful actions of his life, and gave themselves up to every sentiment of pity and compassion, on beholding him pass by.' This by no means suited Mir Jafar and his friends who, meeting secretly, decided that Siraj-ud-daula 'should immediately be put to death, lest the colonel's clemency and moderation should plead for his preservation'.

Siraj-ud-daula was handed over to Mir Jafar's son, Miran, whose father recommended him 'earnestly in public to take the surest methods to prevent his escape, but at all events to preserve his life'. According to Ghulam Husain Khan, however, Miran was 'more expeditious and quick-minded in slaughtering people' than his father, and apparently possessed a talent for arranging murders. 'His system was that such sensations as pity and compassion answered no other purpose than that of spoiling business.' Miran immediately suggested to his friends that they should kill Siraj-ud-daula forthwith. This proposal was 'rejected with indignation' by all but one, a certain Muhammad Beg.

Muhammad Beg went to the ex-*namab*'s prison and there hacked him down. The body was tossed up on to the back of an elephant and

paraded once more through the principal streets of the city, 'by way of notifying', wrote Ghulam Husain, 'the accession of a new sovereign.' It was perhaps significant that, as Siraj-ud-daula's remains were being carried through the streets of Murshidabad, the loot from his treasury was being floated down river to Calcutta.

Siraj-ud-daula's successor was finding his elevated position not quite as satisfactory as it might have been. For one thing, it was clear to the new *nawab* that, though he might occupy the throne, he was not the real ruler. The British were already making this fact known to the *nawab's* feudatories. Immediately after Plassey, Clive wrote to the provincial nobles telling them of the victory and of the change of *nawab* in such a way as to make it plain who had been responsible. But Clive wanted more than the congratulatory letters which he received in reply. He wanted action against the French. When local officials seemed to be ignoring the instructions they received concerning the French, Clive put the *nawab's* chief minister, Rai Durlabh, to work. Even the *nawab* of Oudh, the nominal chief minister of the Mughal empire, was asked to cooperate. His reply was suitably respectful, but there were rumours that he planned an attack on Bengal. These rumours were given added weight when news came that ten French ships had arrived in the river. The possibility of an alliance between the French and the *nawab* of Oudh proved to be fanciful, but it was still conceivable that Law might join with another native ruler and that Bussy might appear from the Deccan.

In fact, Bussy was active in the Northern Circars, and the Madras Committee wanted Clive to return by way of the Company's factory at Vizagapatnam, where a French attack was anticipated. But even if the situation had been reasonably clear in Bengal, Clive could not have left as he did not have enough troops. A detachment under Eyre Coote had been sent off in pursuit of Law, and until it returned there was no question of reducing the British strength in Bengal. Coote never did catch up with Law and Clive recalled him early in August—by which time Vizagapatnam had fallen to the French.

The situation facing the British in Bengal was neither clear-cut nor particularly favourable. One conspiracy had certainly triumphed, but that fact did not put an end to others. Bengal itself was not quiet. The ripples of revolution were being felt throughout the province. There were many local rulers and former officials who had not been involved in the revolution which overthrew Siraj-ud-daula, and though they had not gone to his aid, neither were they particularly

pleased by the triumph of Mir Jafar and his allies. In the chaos that had followed the defeat of Siraj-ud-daula, there were opportunities to be grasped and no shortage of men to grasp them. In the face of potential threats to his authority, the new *namah*'s interests were the same as those of the British. In their eyes, there seemed little purpose in placing a ruler of their own choice on the throne if he was to be threatened with insurrection or invasion. The trouble was that the ruler was not Clive's choice, but that of the Hindu merchants and officials, and there were already signs that relations between them were deteriorating. Once Clive left Murshidabad, relations between Mir Jafar and the British also lost some of their initial cordiality.

Clive himself was anxious to leave Bengal, not for Madras, but for England where he hoped to capitalize on his new reputation as a conqueror. He was also depressed and worried about his health, a worry which the death of Admiral Watson in August did nothing to diminish. But the confusion and insecurity which followed the overthrow of Siraj-ud-daula would not permit him to leave either for Madras or England.

Clive was finding it difficult to make the Company's servants adjust themselves to their changed situation. They were no longer merely traders living in Bengal on the sufferance of a native ruler, but had become a military power with the strength to impose its own will. The trouble was that the will of the majority of the Company's servants in Bengal was directed towards private plunder. Clive's view was somewhat different. He had already made his profit and would probably make more—but not out of private trade or the acceptance of bribes. The merchants' loyalties were primarily to themselves; they hardly considered the Company's interests. For Clive, the Company's well-being and profit were, if not paramount, at least as important as his own. As early as July, he was asking the Directors in London to send him 'capable young men for the civil service'. A month later, he suggested that it would be worth the Directors' while to attract good professional soldiers into their service in India, 'for be assured,' he wrote, 'there are very few in your service at present: the best are killed or dead [of illness or fever]'. To all his farsighted plans was opposed the immediate problem of Mir Jafar and the terms of his treaty with the British, which he seemed intent on evading. In October 1757, Luke Scrafton—who had been left at Murshidabad—reported to Clive that there had been no payment of the instalments due to the British, and that Mir Jafar, suspecting treachery everywhere, was encouraging it by

not paying his troops. There were also, Scrafton said, rumours that Ram Narain, governor of Patna, who had sworn allegiance to the new ruler, was intriguing with the *nawab* of Oudh.

Even before this, Clive had written to Mir Jafar warning him about Ram Narain and hinting that the *nawab* should go and settle matters for himself. Mir Jafar prepared to do so, but failed to tell Clive. When he did, Clive was annoyed. He would, he announced, march with a force to join the *nawab*. This was essential, for the *nawab* could not be permitted to fight a possible battle without a British contingent in his army. If he won an engagement without their aid, he might decide he was strong enough to resist their demands. If he lost, without them, the whole business of finding a compliant *nawab* would have to begin all over again. It was also possible that Mir Jafar, when he arrived at Patna, might join with the French.

The departure of Clive's force from Calcutta was delayed by an outbreak of cholera which killed a large number of his men, including Major Kilpatrick, and it was not until November 17 that he was able to embark his troops for the voyage up river to Murshidabad. When he reached there he found that Scrafton's fears had been real and well-founded. Mir Jafar's barely concealed antagonism towards the Hindu nobles and bankers who had been at the heart of the conspiracy to place him on the throne had led some of them to embark on what appeared to be counter-moves. The minister, Rai Durlabh, was a natural target for the new *nawab's* dislike, as he controlled the treasury, and Clive believed that Rai Durlabh as a result had encouraged rebellion on the part of the Hindu rajas of Purnea and Mithnapur, and of Ram Narain, who was also a Hindu.

From Purnea, Clive's spies had reported an attempt to put up a pretender to the throne in the person of the brother of Shaukat Jang, who had unsuccessfully rebelled against Siraj-ud-Daula. Looking around for other potential rivals, Mir Jafar decided that the late *nawab's* brother might also be dangerous if he became a pawn in the hands of Rai Durlabh, so he had him assassinated. This might well have precipitated a crisis if Clive's arrival had not intervened. When the news came out to meet the British, Rai Durlabh fled to Patna and remained in the capital, surrounded by his own troops, though when Clive sent assurances of protection he preferred to join him at once at Purnea.

When Rai Durlabh did move a meeting with the *nawab* took place in Clive's tent and there was an agreement to maintain the



outcome was also happy for the British, for the *namab* authorized payment of the arrears due under the treaty and—even more important—granted the Company the revenues from lands near Calcutta, which meant that the Company's agents could collect the taxes and debit the proceeds against the sums the *namab* still owed. There would no longer be any need to leave it to the *namab* to pay up, or to be faced with the constant necessity of putting pressure on him when he did not. Clive already foresaw the possibility that, as the *namab* grew stronger and more confident, it would become progressively more difficult to squeeze the money out of him. Not that Clive had any intention of relinquishing control over the government.

Clive had no wish to replace Mir Jafar with some new candidate, which would cause even more disturbance to the economy of Bengal. He wanted a return to normalcy, not a permanent state of revolution. Nevertheless, it was becoming increasingly obvious that Mir Jafar was by no means an ideal ruler. His attitude towards the Hindu bankers and nobles, for example, could have no other effect than ultimately to threaten the Company's interests which were to a large extent dependent on them. Clive therefore decided that he must support the Hindu faction if the *namab* made any real attempt to act against it. Rai Durlabh was already under Clive's protection. So, too, was the raja of Midnapur, who had surrendered to Clive on a promise that the *namab* would pardon him and the British protect him. It was to be Ram Narain's turn next. Even while the force was moving against Patna, Clive ceased to insist that Ram Narain be punished and advocated reconciliation instead. Though the *namab* agreed, he still had hopes of making his brother-in-law, Mir Kasim, governor. But he could not act against Ram Narain, who had been overtly reconciled with him at the meeting in Clive's camp, as long as the British troops were still with the expedition, although he intended to do so after they left. Clive, however, had no intention of leaving before the *namab* did, and Mir Jafar was finally forced to confirm Ram Narain as governor.

The *namab* had also been compelled to grant the British a monopoly in saltpetre. This was not only a trading victory; it also put the Dutch—the Company's last remaining European rivals—in their place. Mir Jafar had been reluctant to grant the monopoly; for one thing, it was extremely profitable, and for another, it meant that he would become dependent on the British for supplies of a material that formed the principal ingredient in gunpowder. But he was quickly reminded where his first interests lay. A letter from Clive

baldly stated: 'We are the same people who obtained you the [throne] and preserved your life at Plassey.' The British, however, were prepared to be generous and supply the *namab* 'with any quantity you may want at the price it costs us'. When the *namab*, in reply, asked for a large amount, he was told that it was too much for his needs. Clive was prepared to allow him the same amount as had normally been used by Alivardi Khan, who, though he 'kept up a very large army and was engaged in war for many years, never used a fifth part of that quantity', plus a little extra. In the end a compromise was reached, which was—of course—still massively in favour of the British.

The news of Clive's success in placing Mir Jafar on the throne had reached quarters other than those which Clive had personally informed by letter. But though the fact was known, it still had to be confirmed by the only imprimatur which gave the aura of legitimacy to an usurped power—the *firman* of the Mughal emperor. Naturally, this was one of the first things to be thought of after the revolution. The Jagat Seth had promised, as part of the terms of the conspiracy, to use his considerable influence at the court of Delhi (and to back it up with cash) to have Mir Jafar confirmed as *namab* as soon as possible after he had seized the throne. By December 23, 1757, nothing had yet happened, and Clive wrote to London: 'The nabob's confirmation is not yet procured at Delhi, nor can I judge when it will. The difficulty is in the price.' A month later, news came from the imperial capital that confirmation had been granted, and that Clive had also been created a noble of the empire and awarded a number of high-sounding titles.

It was still to be some time before the actual documents arrived from Delhi. They were brought by the Jagat Seth himself, who had gone there to handle the negotiations in person. He had taken with him a letter from Clive, asking that Mir Jafar be recognized—which showed that Clive had grasped the symbolic importance, not only of the imperial confirmation of Mir Jafar's position, but also of the fact that it was the British who petitioned the emperor on his behalf. It was all an illusion, though it was not by any means as obvious then as it is today. No one really believed that the possession of an imperial *firman* gave any protection to its holder. The emperor, again through the good offices of the Jagat Seth, had confirmed Siraj-ud-daula as *namab*, but it had not saved him from being deposed and murdered. What the imperial *firman* did do, however, was legitimize not only the *namab* but the conspiracy which had

him on the throne. Above all, it gave the imperial cachet to the kingmaker, Robert Clive. As though to underline this, the *firman* was sent to Clive with a covering letter from the emperor's minister, and it was from Clive that the *namah* learned that the *firman* had been granted. Naturally, the whole of this was known throughout India. Even if the court of Delhi was itself lost in twilight, the agents of the native princes and the Europeans were there and there was certainly no attempt to keep the matter secret. Mir Jafar had undoubtedly been made *namah* by the British, and though he now held the emperor's *firman* it gave him as little protection as it had given his predecessor.

On the whole, Clive seemed to be justified in writing to the Directors in London that 'this great revolution, so happily brought about, seems complete in every respect'. But if Bengal was comparatively quiet, there were other threats growing elsewhere. On April 28, 1758, a French squadron arrived off Cuddalore. The Seven Years' War, nearly two years old in Europe, was now to break out in earnest in India.

## Chapter XV

### ALL IS AT STAKE IN INDIA

ON JUNE 20, 1758, the news reached Calcutta that the French had taken Fort St. David at Cuddalore, the British settlement just south of the French Company's headquarters at Pondicherry. It was astounding news, especially for Clive. The fort had recently been strengthened—'were our enemies,' he wondered, 'supplied with wings to fly in to the place?' He was shocked to hear of those who had surrendered before even the walls had been breached, particularly when there was a British fleet in sight. 'I could wish,' he wrote to Pigot, 'for the honour and welfare of our nation, that court martial would make the severest examples of the guilty in these cases.' But for all Clive's indignation at the surrender of that very fort where he had first proved his talent for soldiering, he was shrewd enough to recognize the very real threat that the French reinforcements had brought with them to the future of the British in India. He was aware, too, that with Lally—the French commander—had come a very different kind of warfare from that which had been the rule during the conflicts between Dupleix and the British. Now there were over four thousand French soldiers in India. It was no longer a question of fielding just a few Europeans—officers, artillerymen, infantry—to stiffen and direct native troops against native troops.

It was a time of decision, a time that would call for resolution and, perhaps more important, for ruthlessness. 'Remember all is at stake in India,' Clive wrote to Pigot, 'and that necessity has no law.' Clive's advice was to lay waste the countryside so that the French would not be able to draw on it either for supplies or for the revenue with which to pay for them. 'Their great want of money,' he went on, 'is well known, and every method which can be thought of to increase their want of it, must greatly conduce to overset all their offensive schemes: can't a body of Maratha or other horse be taken into pay to burn, ravage and destroy the whole country, in such manner as that no revenue can be drawn from thence?' Bengal, he added,

inexhaustible fund of riches, and you may depend upon being supplied with money and provisions in abundance'.

Clive underlined Bengal's importance in the future of the English Company in India. Not that he needed to, for Diderot and the Madras Council—convinced though they were that, if Madras fell, so too would the other Company possessions—believed that as long as Madras was held the commerce of Bengal would provide the Company with an inestimable lead over its possible competitors. In this they were right. Control of Bengal was to be the key to British success, although before that success became total there were to be salutary humiliations in the south.

Despite their capture of Fort St. David, the French position was by no means as strong as it looked. The new commander, Lally—son of an Irish father and a French mother, and himself a Jacobite who hated the English—had been sent out both to sweep the English from India and to ruin their commerce beyond repair. He had also been instructed to clean up the administration of the French Company, which was riddled with inefficiency and corruption. To fight a war, while at the same time attempting to reform the only people who knew anything about the peculiar problems of India, was a great deal to ask of any man. For Lally, it was altogether too much. He flung harsh words at the Company's servants, but lest those he condemned at their posts, in control of the mechanism of the war he had been sent out to win. As if this was not enough, he found that the French naval commander seemed convinced that the safety of his ships was a matter of greater import than either defending the French settlements or helping to attack the English ones. The British fleet had returned south in March, and in the following month the French commander, D'Aché, had fought an indecisive engagement against Pocock. In August he fought another one and then, despite Lally's protests, sailed off to the *Îles de France*.

Lally had been determined on attacking Madras as soon as possible after the fall of Fort St. David, but he was prevented from doing so by the shortage of money at Pondicherry. The French there had made no preparations for war. They had not laid in stores, repaired fortifications, or ensured that there was money in the treasury. Lally had brought some bullion with him, but this seems to have disappeared into the pockets of native creditors and, presumably, of the French merchants whose corruption Lally had attacked merely with words. As no war can be fought without money or credit, some had to be obtained. Lally was advised to look for it

Lally's forces set out on a foraging expedition which turned out to be disastrous. The commissariat was so badly organized that his troops were soon starving. They were short of everything, of tents, transport, gunpowder and shot. When Lally finally arrived outside Tanjore, he was in no position to do anything more than bargain with the ruler—who proceeded to take exception to Lally's threat to send him away into exile. Obviously, the French ought to have besieged the city, but they were not capable of doing so. Lally was compelled to withdraw, without, as he said, "food, money or munitions, barefoot and half-naked, from one vain failure and in despair at having been engaged in so bad an attempt." To add to his discomfort came the news—exaggerated as it must be—that the British fleet had defeated D'Aché and that a British force was on its way to Pondicherry. D'Aché had, in fact, lost the first of an engagement but had broken it off before he was seriously defeated.

After the fiasco of the Tanjore expedition, the British government decided on attacking Madras. He meant to conquer every English settlement in India, one after the other, and when he had finished with the British he proposed moving, with Bussy, into Bengal and conquering the English off there too. There was no more time to waste in such shows or in fighting over the way in which the Government of the East had reduced the French to a small island in the Bay of Bengal, and the land. This, if the King could not be persuaded to do, was an almost impossible task, but Bussy, from the moment he was appointed to the command of the French forces, was determined to do it; instead of waiting for the British to come out, instead of waiting for the British to come out, Bussy, with his own hands, would take the French back to the coast.

by no means securely based, and the removal of troops would undoubtedly mean that submerged antagonisms, of which there were many, would come to the surface. Bussy's opinion was confirmed shortly after he left. A local chief in the Northern Circars seized Vizagapatnam from the French, ran up the British flag, and wrote to Madras for support which the hard-pressed Council could not safely send him. In July, he also wrote to Clive at Calcutta, and the letter arrived at much the same time as the news of D'Aché's encounter with the English fleet and Lally's expedition to Tanjore. Clive's reaction was to send troops to Vizagapatnam. His Council disapproved, but 300 Europeans and 2,000 sepoys under Colonel Forde, a King's officer who had been given command of the Company's garrison in Bengal after Kilpatrick died, were ordered south. Because of adverse winds, the expedition's ships did not reach Vizagapatnam until late in October and Forde's men did not take the field until a month later.

Forde met a French force under Conflans on December 7. The French had about the same number of European troops but many more sepoys. Forde, however, inflicted a severe defeat. The battle took place at a village near Rajahmundry, known as Condore, and though Condore seldom finds a place even in imperialist histories it was a battle of considerable importance. It was the first blow at the French presence in the Deccan and it was followed—after many troubles with mutinous troops—by the capture of the French base at Masulipatam in April 1759.

While Forde was attacking the French in the Deccan, Lally was trying to take Madras. The siege of the town began in December 1758. As a preliminary, a number of other towns, including Arcot, had been occupied, but the siege of Madras was bedevilled from the very beginning by Lally's lack of sea power and the deficiencies of his officers. There was considerable friction between Lally and Bussy, who found himself junior to officers who had only recently come out from France with Lally. In view of his own experience and successes, he not unnaturally resented this, and did nothing to conceal his feelings. Furthermore, he firmly believed that it had been a mistake to weaken the French position in the Deccan for the sake of an attack on the English. It was a conflict of fundamentals. Bussy was convinced that future strength depended on manipulating the native princes by means of alliances of one kind or another, centred on the dominant French position at the court of Hyderabad. If this position was undermined, the whole strength of the French position

in India would be endangered. Lally, on the other hand, was out to destroy the English by attrition, not diplomacy. 'The king and the Company,' he said, 'have sent me to India to chase the English Company out of it. . . . It does not concern me that such and such rajas dispute for such and such a *nawabship*.'

The siege dragged on, making very little progress, until on February 15, 1759 the British fleet—which had been forced to leave the Bay of Bengal at the outset of the monsoon—made its appearance off the coast. At this, already weary of the whole affair, the French left their trenches and made for Pondicherry.

The news of Forde's activities in the Northern Circars did nothing to improve Lally's temper. Though he had sent a detachment to help Conflans, it had arrived too late; its commander simply sailed on to land at Ganjam, where there was no fighting to be done.

Salabat Jang, the ruler of the Deccan, had marched against Forde but had been unable to prevent him from taking Masulipatam. Forde opened negotiations with him and finally, when French reinforcements failed to arrive, Salabat Jang agreed to a treaty which required him to expel the French and cede Masulipatam legally to the British. His acquiescence was a product of his fear that the British might decide to support his brother as a rival to the throne. Forde gave an undertaking that they would not do so. After this, the Northern Circars settled into a comparative state of calm. Forde remained at Masulipatam until October 1759, when he returned to Calcutta in a thoroughly bad temper, not having received confirmation of his appointment to the command of the garrison in Bengal. He arrived just in time to take the field against the Dutch.

In the south, Lally's position had worsened considerably. He was faced again with the eternal problem of money. His army was mutinous because its pay was in arrears, and in October a body of Europeans—with their officers and artillery—actually marched away from Lally's headquarters, announcing that they would not return until they received the ten months' pay that was due to them. They were persuaded to return only by a payment on account and the promise that the arrears would be fully discharged as soon as funds were available—which they would be as soon as D'Aché returned. Unfortunately, D'Aché had been forced to voyage as far as the Cape of Good Hope in his attempt to provision his ships and had spent in the process half the funds that had been waiting for him to take to Pondicherry. D'Aché's prolonged journey to the Cape was a result of the British occupation of Bengal; formerly, the st



of wheat and rice kept at the Iles de France had come from the French settlement at Chandernagore.

When D'Aché finally arrived in September 1759, Admiral Pocock was waiting for him. In the engagement that followed, D'Aché himself was wounded, and the fleet so badly mauled that it put in to Pondicherry, landed what remained of the funds, and, despite the furious protests not only of Lally but of the French merchants, sailed hurriedly away, never to return. The British ships, which had suffered heavy damage to masts and rigging, were unable to pursue it.

While the French forces seemed ever-diminishing, the British were receiving reinforcements from home and were taking the initiative. A force which had been intended for Bengal came ashore at Madras and, under the command of Eyre Coote, began to mop up the French-held towns. In January 1760, Coote attacked French forces at Wandiwash and completely defeated them. It was almost the end for the French in south India.

This news reached Clive in February, and he was not pleased. He did not like Coote and had been particularly incensed when Coote was appointed to command the Company's troops in Bengal in place of Clive's protégé, Forde. Coote had received the appointment from the Directors in London while he was in England, where he had returned in 1758. The news of Coote's success against the French reached Clive at a significant point in his own career. He was with his wife on board a ship which was to take him home to England, when 'it was met with an express, despatched from the coast of Coromandel, with advice that Colonel Coote, having attacked the French in their entrenchments, the latter were totally defeated with the loss of their cannon and baggage, General Lally wounded, and M. de Bussy and Colonel Murphy taken prisoners'. It seemed that the French threat to the English in the south was, if not yet at an end, well on the way to it. But in Bengal, what state of affairs was Clive leaving behind?

## Chapter XVI

### THE HEAVEN-BORN GENERAL

ON JUNE 20, 1758, the same day as the British in Calcutta heard that Fort St. David in the south had fallen to Lally, the Company's ship *Hardwicke* entered the river Hugli. On the following day, the despatches she carried from the Directors in London were in the hands of the Select Committee. Their contents demonstrated the Directors' ignorance of the state of affairs in Bengal—although it was a justifiable ignorance in view of the length of time it took for reports to be transmitted from India to England. The sad story of the loss of Calcutta had taken a year to reach the Directors. A month later they had heard of its recapture, but still knew nothing of the battle at Plassey or the installation of a new *namah* on the throne of Bengal.

The despatches also disclosed the influence of J. Z. Holwell, who had returned to England as soon as he was released from Siraj-ud-daula's custody. With characteristic energy, he had set about using the prestige of his resistance at Calcutta and imprisonment in the Black Hole in order to win for himself the appointment of governor of Fort William. Holwell had gathered some supporters among the Directors, but had also antagonized others. The field was wide open to him as he was the first to arrive in England from Bengal, and he had been, as well as self-righteous, more than candid about the failures of the Company's servants at Calcutta.

Holwell did not succeed in being awarded the appointment himself, but he was able to block the way to anyone else. Divisions among the Directors led to an unfortunate compromise. The governorship, they decided, was to be shared in rotation by four members of a Council of ten, each chairman holding office for four months. One of the four was to be Holwell, when he later returned to India. In the instructions, there was no mention of Clive, as the Directors assumed that he would have returned to Madras after concluding a treaty with Siraj-ud-daula.

These orders were so irrelevant—if not positively d

the present state of Bengal that the Select Comm- They appointed themselves to overrule their superiors in London. Tors made a per- Clive to be governor until such time as the Direc- members of the manent appointment. In a letter to Clive, the e difficulties then Committee listed their reasons, in the form of th the nabob not confronting the British in Bengal. 'The treaty wil- and incomplete; perfected in all its branches; the possession of the l- ch considerably the settlement in no posture of defence; the Fre- with respect to reinforced with military and a fleet; their designs- of impressing a Bengal hitherto unknown; and the impossibility- f the *nawab* and proper idea of this divided power in the minds of ccustomed to the others of this kingdom, who have at all times been a- mmediately, but government of a single person.' Clive accepted i- ed the Directors in a private letter to Pigot at Madras angrily attack- getting, it must for leaving his name out of their instructions—foi- he was still in be assumed, that the Directors did not know t. The allotment Bengal. collect revenue to

The situation in Bengal was still reasonably quiet- ollect revenue to of lands to the Company, from which they could co- gone smoothly, be deducted from the sums due from Mir Jafar, had- enue collection, and Scrafton, who had been put in charge of the rev- nt, but they did was hard at work. His methods were scarcely pleas- *nawab's* officials. not differ greatly from those normally used by the- raising money. Scrafton, in fact, was being particularly successful at- When it is con- In June 1758, he wrote to the Select Committee: 'Rs 231,457-15. sidered that if from June to November which inc- miss in having months of the year the government could collect only- which months I presume Your Honour etc will not think me very r- tional manner, collected Rs 270,000 from December to May, of rs. Clive, how- March, April and May produce very little.' xpayers on the

Scrafton may have been extortionate in the tradi- was concerned. but at least he was more efficient than his predecesso- was concerned. ever, was urging moderation—not in relation to the ta- acted as if the Company's land, of course, but as far as Mir Jafar v- been hoisted There had been many complaints that the British- fairly claim as government did not exist. The British flag had ever- Even before beyond the boundaries of land the British could- uth, Clive had theirs. Clive insisted that such symbols be removed- force of our firm news had been received of Lally's arrival in the so- as well as for written: 'The reputation we have established by th- arms makes it necessary for the Company's advantages

the benefit of the trade in general, that we establish the like reputation for equity and moderation.'

Bearing in mind the possibility that the news from the south, which was soon known at Murshidabad, might inspire Mir Jafar to further intrigue, Clive decided to invite him to Calcutta. Before he arrived, the news became more reassuring. Pocock had engaged the French fleet, and Lally had departed on his expedition to Tanjore. The British broadcast these events as widely as possible.

The *namab's* visit to Calcutta was made into a great ceremonial occasion. There was music and dancing, and a constant round of visits. The gifts presented to the *namab* were costly and, in some cases, bizarre; in the accounts of the visit, there appears an item of 'twelve standing Venusses to pull off behind; one lying ditto'! No business was transacted and Scrafton at least was glad when Mir Jafar departed. 'He has led me a hell of a life here,' he wrote, 'by the constant attention I have been obliged to pay to him and his wenches, for he never went twenty yards from his house but they were with him.'

Before Mir Jafar had left Murshidabad for Calcutta, his son Miran had taken action against Rai Durlabh, if not on the *namab's* express orders at least with his approval. Miran frustrated Rai Durlabh's initial attempt to accompany the *namab* to Calcutta by arranging to have his house surrounded by troops clamouring for pay, and Rai Durlabh was rescued only by the intervention of Watts and Scrafton who were in Murshidabad to act as escorts to Mir Jafar on his journey. He did, in the end, leave for Calcutta with the *namab*, but he was superseded as minister by a Muslim, Omar Beg. This made it obvious to Clive that another attempt was brewing against the Hindu faction which had put Mir Jafar on the throne and whose members were under British protection. Clive had no intention of moving against Mir Jafar, nor, in the light of affairs in the south, adequate forces for a campaign against him. It was a time for diplomacy, and Clive decided to leave this to his agent at Murshidabad, Warren Hastings.

Some time after the *namab's* return to his capital, Hastings was shown a letter allegedly written by Rai Durlabh, which confirmed that he was involved in intrigues against Mir Jafar. Hastings believed the letter to be genuine. Clive did not, and he was probably right. Whatever the truth of it, Rai Durlabh was still at Calcutta and Clive had no intention of giving him up to the *namab*. His alliance with the Hindu nobles and bankers was the bedrock of Clive's policy. The

*namah* was old and would not last forever, while his son Miran, Clive wrote to William Pitt in London, was 'so worthless and cruel a young fellow, and so apparently an enemy to the English, that it will be almost unsafe trusting him with the succession'. Sooner or later it was going to be necessary to place a new *namah* on the throne, and it was best to keep Mir Jafar as mellow as possible until that time arrived. In addition to the difficulties involved in taking action at that particular time, it seemed undesirable to upset the country again before all the sums due under the treaty had been recovered. Trade had by now returned to something like normal. Indeed, all the arguments were in favour of 'smoothness and complacency' towards Mir Jafar.

Clive's own official position was regularized in November 1758. The news of Plassey and its immediate results had reached London in February, where there was now no doubt that Clive must be given the supreme command of the Company's interests in Bengal. But the decision was not made without a severe shake-up in the Court of Directors. Those Directors who still supported Holwell wanted to stick to the rotation system, about which instructions were already on the way to Calcutta (and soon to be rejected by the Committee there). As they were in a majority, they carried the vote, but a number of their fellows were not prepared to accept the decision. They organized a meeting of the proprietors of Company stock and succeeded in ousting the Directors who were opposed to Clive. As chairman, a new and important figure in the history of the Company emerged. His name was Laurence Sullivan. His first act was to reverse the earlier decision and to appoint Clive, 'in consideration of his eminent and repeated services, to be sole president and governor of Fort William in case it should suit his health to remain in India'. In this, the new Directors were satisfying not only what they believed to be their own and the Company's best interests, but the feelings of many people who mattered in England.

The news of Plassey had been received in London as a major victory. It came at a time when things were not going particularly well in the war with France. The government needed a victory and Clive had provided it. 'We have lost our glory, honour, and reputation,' Pitt claimed in the House of Commons, 'everywhere but in India. There I find Watson, Pocock and Clive. What astonishing success has been Watson's with only three ships, which had been laid up for some time on land! He did not stay to careen this and condemn that, but at once sailed into the body of the Ganges. And

by his side Clive—that man not born for a desk—that heaven-born general!’ And, with a reminder to other English generals in other places, he went on: ‘He, it is true, had never learned the art of war or that skill in doing nothing which only forty years of service can bring! Yet he was not afraid to attack a numerous army with a handful of men, with a magnanimity, a resolution, a determination and an execution that would charm a king of Prussia and with a presence of mind that astonished the Indies.’ This over-enthusiasm was to do serious disservice to Clive when the true details of Plassey become known. In the meantime, it not only kept him in India—he had already determined to leave if anyone else was awarded the governorship—but consolidated his position with the British in Bengal.

Though the French threat to Bengal had receded as a result of Forde’s successes in the Northern Circars, a different danger seemed to be raising its head. This time it came from what the British then called a ‘country power’—though it was, in fact, *the* country power. There appeared to be an attempt in preparation to reinstate the power of the Mughals in Bengal. If this were true, it raised certain interesting questions of legality. Would it be right, for example, for a *nawab* who held a *firman* from the Mughal emperor, aided by a foreigner who had been granted a Mughal title, to resist the entry into what was supposed to be a province of the Mughal empire of an army led by the Mughal heir-apparent? Fortunately for the *nawab* and his allies, there were no constitutional courts in India where such a question might be debated. Mir Jafar and Clive were as one. What they had, they held. Nevertheless, the matter was by no means as simple as that.

During 1758, the Mughal heir—or *shahzada*—who was later to become emperor under the title Shah Alam, had fled from the imperial capital where his father, Alamgir, was a prisoner in the hands of his minister, Ghazi-ud-din. The *shahzada*, seeking aid, had acquired a body of troops and tentative alliances with a number of rulers, including the *nawab* of Oudh. It was rumoured that the Jagat Seth was in communication with the *shahzada* and that he was even providing funds to pay his troops. There were also rumours that Ram Narain in Bihar had gone over to the *shahzada*. From Mir Jafar’s point of view, the situation seemed to be dangerous. Ram Narain was well aware that Mir Jafar disliked him, and that his dislike had not been diminished by the fact that Clive had intervened on Ram Narain’s behalf. Mir Jafar also believed the rumours about the Seths and tried to prevent them from leaving on a projected



*shahzada*, addressed in appropriately high-flown language to 'the most high and mighty, protector of the great' and demanding that Clive pay his respects 'like a faithful servant'. In reply, Clive warned the prince that he had received his Mughal title from the emperor, and said that, since the emperor had not informed him of the prince's coming, he could not therefore attend him to pay his respects. He further warned him that: 'I am under the strictest engagements with the present *nawab* of these provinces to assist him at all times; and it is not the custom of the English nation to be guilty of insincerity.' Clive forwarded the letter to Mir Jafar with the information that he had been paid a visit by agents of the prince, who had offered Clive substantial inducements—'provinces upon provinces'—to turn against the *nawab*. 'It is the custom of the English,' Clive added, 'to treat the persons of ambassadors as sacred, and I told the *shahzada*'s agents as much; but at the same time warned them never to come near me again, for, if they did, I would take their heads for their pains.'

A few days later, Clive arrived at Murshidabad with such troops as he had available after Forde's men had been detached. At Calcutta the still incomplete fortifications were manned by the militia and by volunteers.

Clive now found it necessary to bully Mir Jafar. The *nawab* was believed to be intriguing with agents of the Marathas, and was steadily losing the loyalty of those officers who still supported him. Though the situation at court is confusing, it is clear that a variety of conspiracies existed. This was a state of affairs endemic in native courts, but now—as before, with Siraj-ud-daula—there was a constant factor in the shape of the British. Those who were overtly under British protection flouted the *nawab*'s authority. Those who were not, pretended to Clive that the *nawab* was conspiring against him or members of the pro-British faction, and to the *nawab* that the British and their friends were proposing to replace him on the throne.

From this welter of intrigue Clive departed in the direction of Patna, from which he had received the bad news that Ram Narain had gone over to the *shahzada*. This report, which came from the English agent at Patna (who had taken himself off as soon as the *shahzada* arrived near the city), did Ram Narain less than justice. He had no news of Clive, and was convinced that at first sight appeared to be an immense army. The British agent had left, and it looked as if Ram Narain would have to soon matters out for



himself. Consequently, he accepted an invitation to the *shahzada's* camp. There, he saw through the charade that had been mounted for him. The imperial finery had a worn and tawdry look, and the imperial forces were not very impressive, especially as the European troops were not present. For all the graciousness of the reception, Ram Narain felt himself in danger. By a trick, he managed to get away from the camp and shut himself up in the city, still hoping that Clive would appear before the *shahzada* attacked. In the end, Ram Narain decided he had nothing to lose by defending himself, and sparked off the attack by sending one of the imperial generals an offensive note to the effect that he had made a visit and presented a gift, but that as far as he was concerned he owed no allegiance to anyone but the *nawab* of Bengal. His enterprise brought its own reward; the imperial forces were repulsed with heavy losses. When news came that Clive's force was approaching, the *shahzada* raised the siege and left Patna to its governor.

The victory was Ram Narain's, though not according to Clive's reckoning. After Plassey, he needed another success. In letters to Calcutta and London, he claimed this one.

Clive did, in fact, set off in pursuit of the imperial forces, but they had dispersed so widely that they were no longer a coherent army. Clive punished a number of local landowners and petty rulers *pour encourager les autres* and, leaving a small garrison of Europeans and sepoys, set off back to Murshidabad.

The *shahzada* wrote again to Clive, this time in rather vague terms which might conceivably have been interpreted as asking for British protection. Clive toyed with the idea of supporting the prince, and it is possible that if he had only had more men at his disposal he might have considered it seriously. However, the prince would have been something of an embarrassment, a focus for intrigues, and there were enough of those in Bengal at the moment without extending the range to include the whole of northern India. Clive politely advised the *shahzada* to remove himself from Bihar before Clive was forced to do so.

Reports that the prince's force had been driven back before Patna and that he had left Bihar were received with evident pleasure both in Murshidabad and Delhi. Both courts chose to believe that it was Clive's approach rather than Ram Narain's defeat of the prince's army that had reduced the Mughal heir to the status of a fugitive. This was all part of an immense illusion based upon exaggerated rumour, and it scarcely needed any help from Clive to become an

had no hesitation in paying the rent over to their governor, nor did the Court of Directors in London take exception to it—at the time.

Among the many conspiracies which existed, either in fact or rumour, was one allegedly between the *namab* (or his son) and the Dutch. After the victory at Plassey and the elevation of Mir Jafar to the throne, the Dutch had responded with calculated insults to the new *namab* and to the British. They had refused to send the *namab* the presents customary on accession, and he had responded by stopping their trade and arresting the Dutch agent at his court. His grant of the salt-petre monopoly to the British had antagonized the Dutch even more than his grant of the right to search all ships using the Hugli river. When the Dutch chief at Chinsurah complained, Clive was not polite.

Aware that there was dissatisfaction with Mir Jafar in many quarters, particularly among Muslim nobles and some of the Hindu merchants who did not belong to the faction loosely headed by the Jagat Seth, the Dutch sent agents to Miran. They were well received and even had interviews with the *namab* himself, with whom they became reconciled. From their conversations, as well as the reports of their spies, the Dutch came to the conclusion that they had a fair chance of getting away with the same game as Clive. Plassey had not impressed them as a battle. Nor had the defeat of the French at Chandernagore. The Dutch still believed they could defeat Clive if they could only bring reinforcements from their main headquarters at Batavia in the Indonesian archipelago.

Even before the Dutch in Bengal informed their superiors at Batavia of their plans, it had been decided to reinforce the Dutch garrisons in India, including those in Bengal. When the despatches reached Batavia, orders were sent to divert all the reinforcements to Bengal. The British agent at Batavia had wind of this and sent the news to Clive, and confirmation soon arrived in the form of a Dutch ship with troops on board. This ship had hastened on in advance of the main squadron because the captain wanted to do some private trade before the others arrived and spoiled the market!

The *namab* was, at the time, on a visit to Calcutta, and when the Dutch approached him to honour the undertakings they thought he and his son had entered into, he responded by forbidding the Dutch ships which had now joined their vanguard to proceed up river. The British, who controlled the river at Calcutta and were in a position to prevent the Dutch ships from reaching their settlement at

Chinsurah, now began to search all vessels moving up the river. one they found Dutch soldiers concealed.

For some reason, the Dutch hesitated about moving without open support of the *narab*. They had, in fact, misread the situation and the character of Mir Jafar. He might perhaps have welcomed Dutch success against the British, but he had no intention of coming out to help them achieve it. If the Dutch dithered, the British not. They prepared Calcutta for defence and ordered three of Company's ships down river. Batteries of guns were erected strategic positions along the banks.

On November 7, the Dutch complained to Clive and demanded passage for their ships. A member of the Chinsurah council in his way down river to the ships with instructions that they should attack English vessels; they captured a few small country ships loaded with merchandise. The British now ordered their own ships to pass down river beyond the Dutch fleet and station themselves to its rear. Despite a Dutch threat to open fire, the manoeuvre was successfully carried out.

On the night of November 21-22, the Dutch landed troops two days later Colonel Forde attacked a detachment which had been sent from Chinsurah to join up with them and defeated it. The same day, the British ships attacked the Dutch fleet, which surrendered within two hours. On the following day, Forde also encountered troops who had been landed from the ships, and defeated them. The Dutch at Chinsurah gave in and agreed to pay compensation for the Company's losses. Their submission was underlined by an ironic episode. Miran suddenly appeared outside Chinsurah with force of some thousands. He had to be warned off by Clive in person otherwise the Dutch would have found themselves plundered by a man they had foolishly believed to be their ally. The attempt of Dutch to emulate Clive (and Bussy) had failed, and they were longer a threat in Bengal.

This success was somewhat marred for Clive by the return of his black depressions. He felt himself menaced, particularly by the loss of favour among the Directors in London who owed him much. It was partly his own fault, for he chose to believe that Directors were more interested in conquest than in commerce, that they were convinced that conquest increased the profits of commerce. This was by no means so. In spite of all the promises

use of royal troops, for the expenses of convoys, and ships of the Royal Navy. There were additional losses when Company ships fell to privateers.

There was also an immense increase in drafts drawn by the Company's servants in Bengal, but payable in London. It was normal practice for the Company in India to borrow money from private individuals to cover its local expenses and help finance its trade. These loans were repaid by drafts settled in London out of the profits on the sale of merchandise. The drafts had increased in number and value to such an extent that they became a serious drain on the Company's funds. As the Directors had been told that compensation of somewhere in the region of £1,000,000 was promised by the *nawab*, they thought that the increase in drafts must be due to mismanagement in Bengal. In November 1758, they even considered refusing to accept such drafts.

Because of all this, the Directors' letters to the Committee in Calcutta had taken on an increasingly acid tone, though they had made every effort to exempt Clive from the criticism they levelled at his colleagues. Unfortunately, Clive reacted as if he himself were being attacked. He was, perhaps, so sure that he *was* the Company in Bengal that, whatever the disclaimers, the Directors' strictures must relate to him. This was too much for the 'heaven-born general'. Foolishly, he committed the weight of his own prestige to the inefficiencies and cupidity of most of his colleagues.

Many of the Company's servants in Bengal had decided to return to England soon and enjoy the profits they had made out of the revolution; Holwell, who had returned to Bengal and now held the position of second in Council, knew he could expect very little from the new Directors. None of them felt they had anything to lose by openly defying their superiors. Holwell drafted an insolent reply to the Directors' complaints and the rest of the Council signed it—including Clive. The letter suggested that the Directors should mind their manners: 'The diction of your letter is most unworthy of yourselves and us in whatever relation considered, either as masters to servants, or gentlemen to gentlemen.' It accused them of listening to gossip: 'Groundless informations have without further scrutiny, borne with you the stamp of truth.' And added that, 'if the breath of scandal joined to private pique' was to destroy their faith in their servants who had given the Company of their best, then it was highly probable that no gentlemen would 'hold your service longer nor exert themselves further in it'.

This was hardly the kind of letter to advance Clive's ambitions, at least with the Company. However, he hoped that once he arrived in England he would be able to involve the government in some further active participation in Indian affairs. He had already written to Pitt outlining his plans for the conquest of more than Bengal, for his experiences had inflated his sense of destiny. Had he not placed his own man on the throne of the richest province in the country? Had not the heir to the Mughal throne retreated before him? It was a time for empire, and for the British nation formally to acquire the sovereignty of Bengal. Such a burden was perhaps too great for a purely commercial organization. Before Pitt's eyes Clive dangled 'an income yearly of upwards of two million sterling' which, with other advantages accruing from trade monopolies, would help 'diminish the heavy load of debt under which we at present labour'. By 'we' Clive did not mean his employers; he meant the nation, suffering from the demands of a costly war. Pitt was straining everything to recover the initiative lost in a war which had been almost uniformly disastrous for Britain, and Clive's ideas must have had an instant appeal. But despite Clive's successes in Bengal, India *had* to be a sideshow. Britain was being threatened from across the Channel and in the American colonies. Plans were being made to drive the French out of Canada and North America. The government hoped that the same thing was happening in India. The matter of acquiring a new empire would have to wait.

Clive had put his ideas to the chairman of the Directors, Laurence Sullivan, at about the same time—without, of course, suggesting that the matter would be too much for the Company. But Sullivan soon knew what Clive had written to Pitt. He knew, too, of Clive's disapproval of the appointment of Eyre Coote to command the Company's forces. Clive's return to England was imminent. Perhaps he would come as an enemy of the Company. Certainly he would prove a powerful figure, and might be dangerous. The Directors were apprehensive. So, too, were the British in Bengal who felt that, losing Clive, they lost their security.

The European residents of Calcutta, in an address to Clive, expressed their fears that, when Clive's influence was withdrawn, anything might happen, for 'there is, they wrote, 'so strong an appearance of intestine war, foreign invasions, or intrusions from the inland country powers, and which is only prevented by the eminent character you deservedly bear throughout the Mughal's dominions'. Clive replied that they exaggerated, and in any case added, 'I

may perhaps be able to serve you more effectually [in England] than my continuing here'. There is no doubt that Clive believed it. Did Clive really think that the British in Bengal had nothing to fear? Reinforcements were on the way, and so was a new military commander, Major Catland, an experienced soldier in whom Clive had complete confidence. But there were real threats and potentially dangerous treachery and conspiracy lurking in the shadows, and Clive may well have been anxious to leave before he became involved in some occurrence from which he might not emerge victorious. He wanted nothing to mar his reputation before he arrived in England. Despite all his dreams, however, he must have known how fragile was the settlement he had imposed on Bengal. Certainly, he was aware of the quality of the men who were to succeed him. It is possible that this knowledge actually contributed to his decision not to stay longer in India. And undoubtedly he had another reason for leaving, one which was to set the pattern of behaviour of those who followed him in command of the Company's affairs in Bengal. As his successor, Henry Vansittart, put it: 'It was Colonel Clive's good fortune to leave India before the Company's treasure was totally exhausted.'

## MORE REVOLUTIONS

### Chapter XVII

IN THE second half of the eighteenth century, two new words came into the English language—'nabob' and 'loot'. Both were of Indian origin, and their adoption into English was a direct consequence of the activities of the British in Bengal. To the pamphleteer, a nabob was not an Indian prince but a term of abuse for those servants of the Company who had returned to England laden with plunder, and who used their wealth to bribe politicians, to purchase rotten boroughs, and generally to attempt to influence the governing of the country. The loot they had acquired came from the spoliation of Bengal.

When Clive left for England, he remarked that Bengal 'was out of all danger but that of venality and corruption'. For a while, however, it seemed that the possibility of an invasion by the Mughal heir-apparent—who had gathered his forces together again—might still endanger Clive's settlement. The *shahzada* had again approached the borders of Bihar, before Clive left for home. Clive sent Major Caillaud to reinforce Ram Narain and tried unsuccessfully to prevent Miran from accompanying him with a large force.

After the *shahzada* crossed the frontier, he headed for Patna. Ram Narain prepared to resist, though it was clear that most of his officers were none too willing to fight, in effect, for Mir Jafar. Caillaud hoped that Ram Narain would not attempt to mount an attack on the *shahzada's* forces, in case treachery should intervene, but Ram Narain did attack and was defeated—as a result of treachery. Wounded, he retired to the city with the troops Clive had left behind the previous year. Caillaud moved as rapidly as he could towards Patna, forcing the *shahzada* to retire from the city. On February 22 the two forces met in battle. The prince avoided attacking Caillaud and concentrated instead on Miran, who was driven back. With Caillaud's assistance, however, Miran's men recovered and counter-attacked, pushing the imperial force to flight. Unfortunately, they did not pursue them, as Miran had received two

scratches which he was then pleased to think were very dreadful wounds. He retired to Patna to nurse them. With this reprieve, the *shahzada* recovered and made a raid into Bengal proper. He was pursued by Caillaud, but no decisive action ensued as Miran refused to cooperate.

About this time, the *shahzada* received news that his father had been murdered. He therefore proclaimed himself emperor, with the title of Shah Alam—which means 'king of the world'. In the hope of giving the title at least some reality, for he was an emperor not only without an empire but without an imperial capital either, he decided to try once more to capture Patna. Advised by Jean Lav, the new emperor again besieged the city, but the defenders made a sortie supported by reinforcements sent by Caillaud, and the outcome was that Shah Alam left Bihar once more.

All that remained was to punish those local rulers and officials who had, as before, taken an opportunity to rebel against Mir Jafar. Miran refused to help Caillaud in this task and the differences between the two men were only settled by the death of Miran, who was killed in his tent on July 3. According to a contemporary Muslim historian, he was struck by lightning, in fulfilment of a curse which had been put upon him. Another said that he was listening to his storyteller when there was a roll of thunder and a flash of lightning; after it, his body was found full of holes and his sword lay melted by his side. Another, more prosaic, version claimed that Caillaud had had him assassinated; there is even less satisfactory evidence for this theory. Whatever the truth, Miran's death removed from the scene a figure who would never have been reconciled to the British and who would probably have had to be prevented from succeeding to the throne.

The question of who should sit upon that throne was again becoming a matter for discussion amongst the British, because the throne and money were synonymous to the Company's servants in Bengal. The threat from the new Mughal emperor had at least been swept aside, but nothing could diminish the Company's financial difficulties. With all the immense sums that had been extracted from Mir Jafar, it would have appeared that, on the surface at least, the Company had nothing to worry about. In fact, the situation was desperate. The *navab* was behind with his payments. The Directors in London had stopped sending out bullion to pay for their trade as Clive had told them that the income from the *navab* and other sources would amply cover all trading expenses. Unfortunately, it



had not done so. The Company's servants were carrying on their own commerce, using the customs-free privileges granted to the Company. They were making handsome profits and remitting them home by various means, including drafts on the Company in London. The Company's own trade suffered because it was now forced to buy from its own employees at prices which they themselves fixed in their capacity as agents of the Company. The Company was still expected to defray the costs of the military establishment, and these, of course, formed the initial deductions. The Company, in fact, was poor—though its servants were not.

The first thing that occurred to certain members of the Committee in Bengal as a way of raising money for the Company, and perhaps profit for themselves in the form of bribes, was to interfere once again in the government of the country. The obvious move was to replace the *nawab* with a man who would not only be more positively friendly to the British but who could be persuaded, out of gratitude, to grant more revenues to the Company.

This was not Holwell's view, however, and Holwell had at last achieved a position of authority. This was a result of the wastage of Council members after the profits of Clive's revolution had begun to come in. With their share of the cash from Mir Jafar, ten members of Council had left for England in order to spend their wealth in happier surroundings (before the Directors had time to reply to their offensive letter). Their departure brought Holwell to seniority until someone could be appointed governor.

Holwell thought that the best way to serve the Company's interests would be for the British to take over the government of the country. The new Mughal emperor, if pressed hard enough, would be unlikely to refuse to grant the province to the British. There would then be no need for puppet *nawabs* and all the troubles that went with them. This idea would probably have avoided a great deal of trouble in one way—though not with the Directors in London, who would not have looked on such a solution with any pleasure. Clive himself had, in fact, advocated such a plan but had rejected it on the grounds that there were not enough troops in Bengal, and the Company would not be prepared to pay for more.

Holwell was therefore convinced that the *nawab* should simply be deposed, but there were others who believed that Mir Jafar should be deposed and replaced. One man with a very direct interest in such a course of action was the *nawab's* brother-in-law, Mir Kasim, who continually warned the British that the *nawab* was he

interests and suggested that the situation would improve greatly if he, Mir Kasim, were placed in a position of authority. First he suggested that he should replace Ram Narain as governor of Patna, a position Clive had earlier refused him. When Miran died, Mir Kasim volunteered for the job of chief minister to the *nawab*. If the throne became vacant, Mir Kasim would certainly be an obvious candidate. Caillaud and other members of the Committee did not approve of Holwell's idea of taking over Bengal for the Company. It was therefore decided that the plan should be shelved until the new governor, then on his way from Madras, arrived.

When Henry Vansittart reached Calcutta in August 1760, Holwell had changed his mind. He suggested now that Mir Kasim should be made chief minister. His view of Mir Kasim had become more favourable partly because he had acted with great decisiveness when some of the *nawab's* troops had rebelled over lack of pay; Mir Kasim had given them some money on account and a promise of the rest. More important still, Mir Kasim had conformed to protocol and had given Holwell 'presents', and promised more to come. Holwell pretended to believe that all Mir Kasim wanted was to become minister.

When the new governor arrived, Holwell's was not the only plan to be considered. Caillaud wanted Mir Kasim to be made governor of Bihar, where the British contingent could keep an eye on him. It was suggested that Ram Narain could be compensated by being given another appointment, and that Raj Balabh—a Hindu who had been advisor to Miran—should be made chief minister to the *nawab*. The main obstacle here was Raj Balabh himself, for Warren Hastings reported that he had been the man responsible for much of Miran's antipathy to the British.

In the end, Mir Kasim was summoned to Calcutta, where he was sounded out on what he would give the British in return for being made chief minister. When he arrived, his first proposal was that he should be made *nawab*. The British would not consent to this. He could, they said, be chief minister; however, they would guarantee him the succession when Mir Jafar died. In return, he was to cede a substantial piece of territory to the Company.

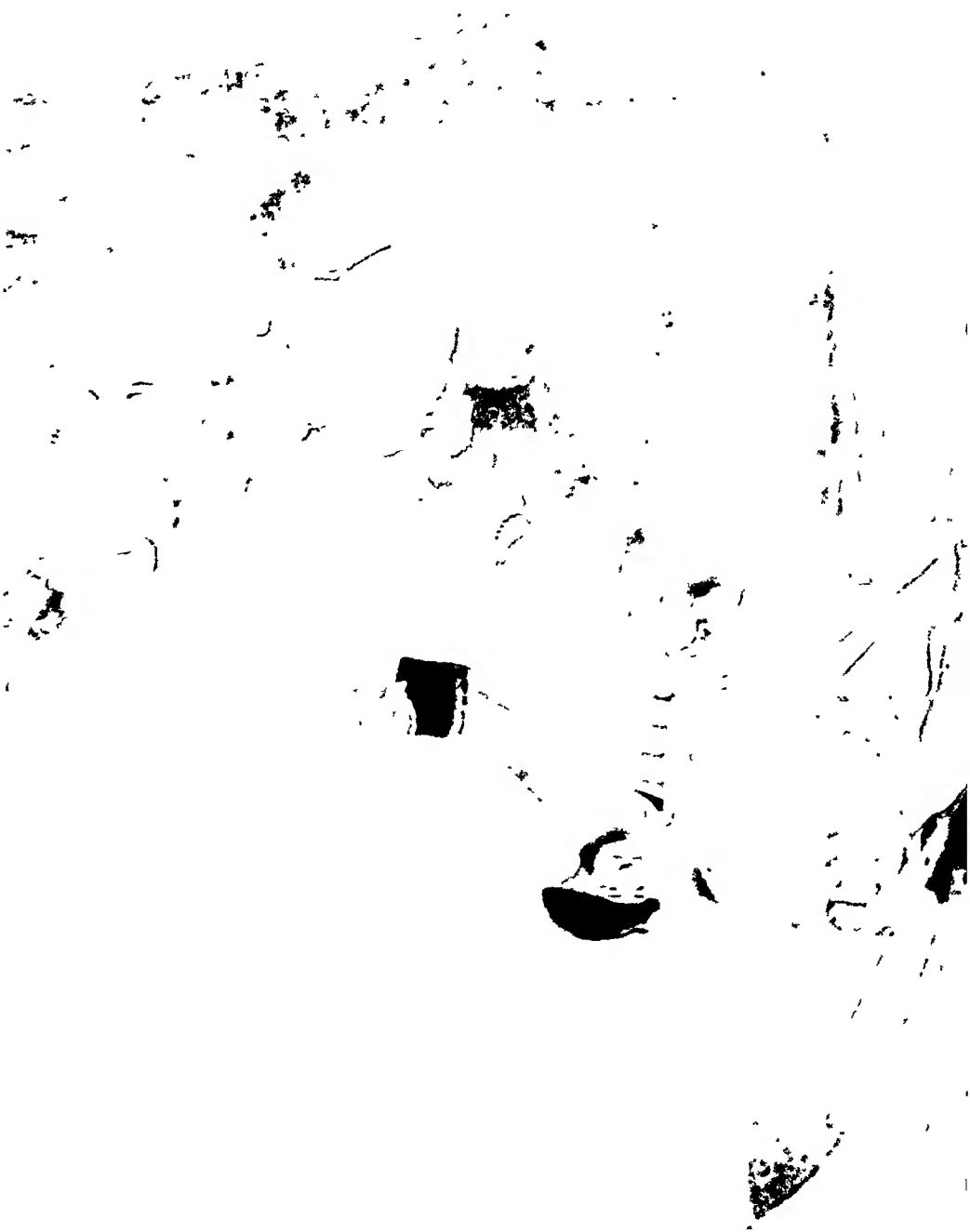
All that remained was the task of persuading Mir Jafar to accept the arrangement. Vansittart and Caillaud, escorted by a substantial force of soldiers and artillery, left for Murshidabad in October. Carrying out the mission was not as easy as everyone had hoped. After a series of fruitless discussions, Caillaud occupied the outer

CALCUTTA, PARK STREET, THE HOUSE OCCUPIED BY CLIVE  
IS IN THE BACKGROUND, TO THE RIGHT

CALCUTTA, THE GOVERNOR'S RESIDENCE.



CLIVE RECEIVING FROM THE NAWAB NAJIB-UD-DALA A  
CONTRIBUTION TO HIS FUND FOR DISABLED OFFICERS  
AND SOLDIERS



defences of the Moti Jhil palace—into which the *namab* had retired—and demanded his submission. Mir Jafar gave in, after a period of hesitation, and then surprised the British representatives by offering to resign the throne provided his life was protected. Mir Kasim had been invited to follow the expedition to Murshidabad, and when he arrived he was declared *namab*. Mir Jafar left for Calcutta and the safety of British protection. The new ruler now paid his debts—to the Company, with the cession of three districts to the west, north-west, and east of Calcutta; to those who had put him on the throne, with a *poorboine* of £200,000. It was to prove small recompense for what turned out a blunder of the worst sort. Those who put Mir Kasim on the throne claimed that they had done so because he was a person of some ability and character. But these were most certainly not the qualities the British needed in a *namab*. If there had to be one at all, then a weak and compliant one was not only desirable but essential. They had had enough trouble with Mir Jafar, who had been no more than obstructive: Now they had replaced him with someone who would probably turn out to be a great deal more than that. Vansittart and Caillaud had, in fact, been outmanoeuvred by Mir Kasim—and that alone should have sounded a warning. But it did not, and the British set about confirming him as ruler. The wandering emperor, Shah Alam, was still threatening Bihar; after Caillaud's withdrawal, he had even begun collecting taxes in an area not far from Patna. He was, however, in touch with the British. The new *namab* needed the emperor's *firman*, and the emperor would expect to be paid for it. In the eyes of the British, the idea of carrying the emperor back to Delhi by the force of British arms became more and more appealing. That such a prospect should have been seriously considered was an indication of the fantasy world in which they were living. Caillaud and the British agent at Patna were instructed to start negotiations with Shah Alam. Major Carnac, however, was replaced by a new military commander, Major Carnac. Carnac set out from Patna with a force made up entirely of European troops and, meeting up with Shah Alam, soundly defeated him, capturing Jean Law and the French contingent as part of the booty: Carnac followed up this engagement so vigorously that the emperor offered terms, joining Carnac, Shah Alam travelled with him to Patna in February 1761. It now seemed that all was set for the emperor and the British to become allies. Shah Alam himself was convinced that, with British

aid, he could retake his capital and assert his authority. The British were anxious for the benefits which would result from putting an emperor back on his throne. But they reckoned without Mir Kasim, who made himself as awkward as possible. First he refused to meet the emperor at all, then agreed only if the meeting took place in the English settlement at Patna. Then he refused to issue a proclamation announcing Shah Alam's assumption of the imperial throne, unless the emperor departed beforehand. The British, who were still posing to support the emperor in his campaign to recover Delhi, could hardly swallow this, and the situation looked like stalemate. Mir Kasim next withdrew his own troops from Carnac's command and took Carnac's response—which was to recall *his* troops—as an insult. The *namab* apparently chose to believe that the British troops were mercenaries and that he was the one to decide what they should do. His belief was, in effect, confirmed when in April Carnac was superseded by Eyre Coote, fresh from victories in the south which had culminated in the preceding January in the surrender of the French settlement at Pondicherry and the effective end of the French bid for power in India. Vansittart wrote to Mir Kasim to assure 'His Excellency that the colonel [Coote] will obey him'.

Coote was not, however, the kind of man to take orders from Mir Kasim, especially as his own brief from Vansittart included instructions to protect Ram Narain, whom the *namab* intended to destroy. The *namab* tried to persuade Coote to pay an official visit to him before he went to see Shah Alam, but Coote refused, as he was not prepared to insult the emperor he was still supposed to be escorting back to Delhi.

Mir Kasim was undoubtedly afraid that the British would give their wholehearted support to Shah Alam. There had been rumours that the emperor had offered to grant the British the *diamini* of Bengal, that is to say, the right to collect the revenue of the province. This would have left Mir Kasim with control only of the administration, while the British held the real strings of power. In such circumstances he would never be independent—and he intended to be so. It was, in fact, true that the offer had been made, and the British had not refused it, merely deferred making a decision. Mir Kasim, however, was determined to wreck any possibility of an alliance between Shah Alam and the British, and, partly because of his intransigence and partly because of the weakness of Vansittart and his Council, he succeeded. Indirectly, he did the British a service, for it was highly improbable that they could have mounted an



put a brigade under the command of one Walter Reinhardt, who had been a sergeant in the French army and now hid his identity behind the name of Sumru.

Mir Kasim also moved against such nobles as he believed to be involved in conspiracy or capable of treachery. An army of spies kept watch on suspects who were still too useful to be disposed of, like the Seths, while the others were simply assassinated. In Murshidabad, the *nawab* achieved quiet—the quiet of terror. But for all he did to ensure his independence, there always remained the British force, which he did not feel himself strong enough to take on. Nevertheless, he could hardly continue to survive if something was not done about the Company's servants, who were ruining the economy of Bengal with their demands and defrauding the *nawab's* treasury by using duty-free passes which were theoretically not intended for private trade. Even this might have been tolerated if the British had confined their activities to the export trade, but they did not. On the contrary, they had made themselves the dominant figures in the country's internal commerce, using their passes themselves or selling them to Indian merchants for the trade in salt, tobacco and betel nut, the chief articles of general trade in Bengal.

Clive had not sanctioned such misuse of the Company's privileges, but he had done nothing concrete to discourage it. Indeed, he had himself asked for, and been granted, duty-free privileges for some of his friends. The Directors, for obvious reasons, were strongly opposed to the Company's servants monopolizing, for their own profit, trade that should have been the Company's, but there was nothing much they could do about it except give orders which were not enforceable, or enforced. After Clive's departure, misuse of the Company's passes increased enormously. The value of these passes was so great that they were regularly forged and used by both native traders and foreign adventurers. Others, taking advantage of the dominant position of the English in Bengal, dressed their retainers as British sepoys and flew the Company's flag, and by this means carried their goods free of duty and also took the opportunity to threaten farmers and others into giving up their produce, either for very low prices or none at all. Local officials of the *nawab's* administration were either involved in the racket themselves or too frightened to act against anyone who bore the British flag.

Mir Kasim tolerated this state of affairs until he felt himself strong enough to withstand the menace to the state revenue. His complaints to Vansittart only began after Ram Narain had been removed from



office, and it was not until May 1762 that he raised objections to the activities of the native agents of the British. New customs posts were set up and ships carrying the Company's flag were stopped for inspection. The English, in reply, attacked the *nabob's* officials. After a tour in the countryside, Warren Hastings reported to Vansittart in April 1762: 'The world, judging only from facts, sees the nabob's authority publicly insulted; his officers imprisoned; sepoy's sent against his forts; and he is told, that the chief of the English, in these parts, disavows the nabob's right to the *subaship*. The obvious end of such symptoms is an open rupture. The nabob's enemies receive encouragement from this hope; and the traitors about his person, use it as an argument to them to persist in their revolt.' It was little wonder that a *nabob* who was not content to be a puppet now moved more and more into open opposition.

Mir Kasim did not lack allies, but they were allies without power. This was so even though Henry Vansittart could be numbered amongst them. Warren Hastings was another, still too junior to have much influence with his colleagues. As the *nabob's* hostility grew and found expression in a variety of ways, Vansittart tried to restrict the activities of the Company's servants—completely without success.

After visiting Mir Kasim at his new capital of Monghyr in December, Vansittart and Hastings came to an agreement with him on a method of determining disputes between the agents of the English and the *nabob's* officials. The duties on inland trade were also regularized. The duty on salt, for example, was fixed for the British at nine per cent, a very preferential tariff compared with the thirty or forty per cent charged on the same commodity when it was carried by a native merchant unfortunate enough not to have the Company's pass. It was settled, too, that the native judicial officers would decide disputes, although before their judgment was put into effect the *nabob* was to be informed of it. While he was at Monghyr, Vansittart accepted or demanded—it is not clear which—a substantial present.

When news of the agreement reached Calcutta, it was repudiated by the members of Council. Vansittart was now in a minority in the Council because an order had arrived from the Directors in London dismissing all those who had signed the offensive letter to them; new men had been appointed, and most of them were hostile to Vansittart. The members of Council were particularly incensed as the first they knew of the agreement was when a translation came

into their hands of the *navab's* instructions to one of his officials, ordering that the customs officers should stop English ships. Vansittart had, in fact, asked the *navab* to keep the agreement secret until he returned to Calcutta but, either by design, or in his anxiety to put the agreement into force, the *navab* had acted at once. The Council intended to accept no loss of privileges at all, and were certainly not prepared to permit the *navab's* judicial officers to decide on the merits of a case involving British trade. On this matter Vansittart had not only the Council against him but the whole of the British community and their friends.

Not unnaturally, the *navab* was extremely angry at the Council's reaction and wrote to insist that Vansittart make them change their minds. Vansittart was in no position to do so. He was under the most violent attack, allegedly for accepting a bribe as the price of his signature on the agreement, and also because the *navab* had granted exemption to Vansittart's private trade, which, it was argued, meant that he was making unfair profit out of his position. The accusations were ill founded, but Vansittart undoubtedly had accepted a 'present' as well as special privileges for himself. This may, in the moral sense, have been reprehensible, but it was the discrimination against his fellow countrymen that rankled and turned into hatred. Nevertheless, the Council did have sound sense on their side. Vansittart's agreement to allow the *navab's* judicial officers jurisdiction over English-men amounted to a further abdication of the powers that had been won at Plassey and afterwards. If they accepted the *navab's* authority, the British would certainly be setting their feet on a road which would simply lead them back to the position they had occupied in the days before they put Mir Jafar on the throne.

The behaviour of the British in Bengal has often been condemned. Macaulay drowned the case for the defence in the torrent of his prose, and Indian historians have been inclined to agree with him—though neither he nor they have been remotely objective. In demanding privileges, the British were asking no more than the normal perquisites of power which Muslim rulers and their supporters accepted as of right. Neither side cared at all for the people who really suffered—the mass of the population of Bengal—not have, those who, since that time, have sought to defend the actions of one side or the other. There was, in fact, nothing to choose between them, for the conflict was not between good and evil but between rival plunderers. In modern eyes, the British may appear to have been a sordid pack of scoundrels. In the Bengal of the time, however,

they were nothing of the sort. If any criticism is to be made, it must be that they were inefficient and inadequately acquainted with the realities of the situation in which they found themselves.

Mir Kasim, on the other hand, was well aware of what he was doing. Whether he was wise in assuming that the British would, voluntarily, reduce their power, is another matter. From his dealings with Vansittart, he at least had proof that the British could be outmanoeuvred. His reaction to the Council's rejection of his agreement with Vansittart was to take the unprecedented step of equalising customs duties for everybody. It was the first phrase of a declaration of war. In March, the *namab* issued an order that *all* his subjects could trade without payment of duty—thus destroying, at a stroke, the value of the Company's duty-free passes.

When he received the anticipated protest from the British, the *namab* agreed to meet two representatives, but only if they were not accompanied by a large force. He feared that the British might attack him, and also believed that another conspiracy of the kind which had led to the overthrow of Siraj-ud-daula was in the making. Mir Kasim therefore sent a party of soldiers to Murshidabad to seize the Seths and bring them to Monghyr. When they arrived, they were treated with courtesy and allowed to move about freely, though they were constantly watched to ensure that they did not leave the city. When this news reached Vansittart, he immediately protested—and was informed that all the *namab* had done was invite the Seths, as the most important bankers in the state, to take up residence at his new capital.

The two British representatives, Hay and Amyatt, reached Monghyr in May. Mir Kasim refused all their demands, including one for the release of the Seths. The *namab* was now openly preparing for war. The British representatives remained at Monghyr, but were insulted and ignored; the *namab*'s officials stopped a consignment of arms to the British force at Patna; he could hardly have made his attitude clearer. On June 22, Amyatt departed from Monghyr, leaving Hay behind as a hostage. Early in July, near Murshidabad, his party was attacked and Amyatt killed; his head was cut off and sent to the *namab*.

The Council at Calcutta had already come to the conclusion that they would have to fight. They had heard that Mir Kasim had opened up negotiations with the *namab* of Oudh. Troops were being moved into Patna, and the Company's settlement was in danger. On June 25, the military commander, Ellis, concluded that attack was the

best form of defence and suddenly seized the city, driving out the *narab's* representative. Unfortunately, the British troops were allowed to wander around in search of plunder and when a force of the *narab's* army arrived, led by the Armenian commander-in-chief, it was able to retake the city and drive the British back to their settlement. Ellis decided to leave Patna and make for Oudh, but he was overtaken and forced to surrender.

When this news reached Calcutta on July 4, it was finally agreed—after the most violent dissensions—that war should be declared on Mir Kasim, and that Mir Jafar should be restored to the throne. Four days later, Mir Jafar found himself once again *nawab* of Bengal. A British force under Major Adams was already in the field, and he was soon able to report successes against Mir Kasim's troops. Finally after a series of engagements, Adams reached Monghyr and, in October, took possession of the city. Mir Kasim had left in good time, taking the Seths with him.

At a village on the way to Patna, Mir Kasim had the Seths executed. His reasons may have been political, but it is more likely that he feared the Seths would offer bribes of such size that one of his commanders might be seduced into murdering him. This may also have been the reason why he had his principal commander assassinated on the following day. Mir Kasim also threatened to kill all his British prisoners, and when news of the siege of Monghyr reached him after he arrived at Patna, he ordered Sumru—who was said to have been a butcher before joining the French army—to murder them. On October 6, Sumru's soldiers surrounded the prisoners' quarters and Sumru summoned the three senior Englishmen to him. They were cut to pieces and their remains thrown into a well. Sumru's men then attacked the other prisoners. These tried to defend themselves with bottles and pieces of furniture but, finally, all were killed. Altogether, fifty civilians and military officers were murdered and about one hundred European soldiers.

On October 27, Major Adams arrived outside Patna. Mir Kasim, hoping to draw Adams in pursuit, had already left the city, but Adams stayed where he was and embarked on a siege which ended on November 6 with a successful storming of the walls. Afterwards, Adams set off in pursuit of Mir Kasim, but halted at the river Karamnassa—which marked the boundary between Bihar and Oudh—to await instructions from the Council in Calcutta.

At Calcutta, with Mir Jafar once again on the throne, some of the old familiar problems reappeared. Though his forces were to be

limited, he was to be allowed to choose his own ministers. Mir Jafar immediately took advantage of this by appointing as his chief minister one Nand Kumar—a Hindu who had been an associate of his son, Miran—despite the English desire that Rai Durlabh should be reinstated in his old position. The English might have insisted, but did not, although they do seem to have had a glimmer of realization that they were storing up trouble for themselves. Still, the inland trade duties were reimposed on everyone except the English, and the salt tax was reduced to a mere two and a half per cent.

For the moment, Mir Kasim was free from harassment. Adams, ill, had returned to Calcutta and died there. His successor was also forced to relinquish the command. Seizing his opportunity, Mir Kasim tried to subvert the Company's European troops, including some Frenchmen who, after the fall of Pondicherry, had taken service with the British. In January 1764, there was a mutiny among the European troops at Patna, who set off for the Karamnassa river; there, most of them were finally persuaded to return, though a body of French soldiers crossed the river into Oudh. The soldiers' main complaint was that they had not received prize money after the capture of Patna. They were, therefore, paid an advance on this—which promptly incited the native soldiers to mutiny. It was only when they, too, were given some of the amount due to them that the unrest subsided. The British did not, after this, consider the troops trustworthy enough for a campaign in Oudh, and Carnac, who had taken over command, moved no farther than Buxar, a spot about half-way between Patna and Benares.

Taking advantage of the lull, the *manab* of Oudh and the emperor Shah Alam decided to pool their resources with Mir Kasim—an object lesson in how fluid friendships were in the India of the time. Calcutta heard rumours that Mir Jafar's minister, Nand Kumar, had even opened secret negotiations with the three allies, but there was no proof. Carnac wanted to remove Nand Kumar from his position but told the Council it would have to be done by force. The Council balked at this, and Nand Kumar survived.

The imperial forces now began to move into Bihar and Carnac retired from Buxar as there was a chance that he might be cut off from his base at Patna. This sensible manoeuvre upset the frightened men in Calcutta, and Carnac was warned, rather pompously, that 'all our successes against the powers of this empire have been owing to acting offensively and always pushing to the attack'. On May 3, the imperial forces attacked Carnac's army, but, after an

action lasting most of the day, were forced to retreat. Carnac's force was too weak to pursue them and his contact with the enemy reduced itself to meetings with envoys, who offered negotiations which he refused to take seriously.

The Council at Calcutta was angry over the lull, and consistently pressed Carnac to take the offensive. Indeed, the hostilities between the British in Fort William and their commander in the field continued for months. Carnac maintained that his men were both fatigued and untrustworthy, but the Council doubted it; surely, they suggested, the men must by now have recovered their strength at least, if not their loyalty. In the end, Carnac left his command and returned to Calcutta. Major Hector Alnuro was sent out to replace him.

Alnuro was instructed to get the forces into a state of military discipline so that he might start a campaign against Shah Alam and his allies. Unrest was still prevalent among the native troops, and in September a battalion openly mutinied at a small military station not far from Patna. Alnuro immediately went to the station and, selecting twenty-eight of the mutineers, held a drumhead court martial. All were found guilty, and Alnuro had eight of them executed by having them secured over the muzzles of field guns in which the charges were then ignited. This method of execution was one of long standing in India, and had been adopted by the British because it combined punishment with horror for those who had to witness it. In fact, according to Alnuro, there was not a dry eye amongst the [English] Marines who witnessed this execution, although they had long been accustomed to hard service; and two of them had actually been on the execution party who shot Admiral Byng in the year 1757. The rest of the guilty men were distributed among the other stations and executed there, as a lesson to anyone else who thought of mutiny.

Alnuro's action did restore military discipline and, early in October, the British force began their move into Oudh. On October 24 Alnuro encountered the imperial forces at Buxar. Against Alnuro's small army of 900 Europeans, 5,000 sepoys and 900 native cavalry were assembled about 40,000 men, some officered by Europeans, and substantial artillery also in the hands of Europeans. The cavalry included 5,000 Rohillas, expert horsemen of great courage and vigour. The battle began at 8 a.m. on the 25th and ended, after an extremely bloody conflict, at sunset, with the rout of the imperial army. The debacle was intensified by the demolition, on the orders of the

*manab* of Oudh, of a bridge across a river, which left a large body of men at the mercy of the pursuing British.

After the battle, Shah Alam sent his congratulations to Munro and suggested an alliance. He had, he said, been a virtual prisoner in the hands of the *manab* of Oudh. The *manab* also asked for terms. When he was offered terms which demanded the surrender of Mir Kasim, he rejected them and fled first to Lucknow and then into the Rohilla country to the west. Mir Kasim escaped into obscurity.

Buxar was a far more bitterly contested battle than Plassey had been. Though there had been much buying and selling of loyalties beforehand, they had not been as successful as the conspiracy which had undermined Siraj-ud-daula's army at Plassey. The subversion did reduce the odds against Munro considerably, but there was a time when he might well have lost the day. Even after Buxar, as he and his troops pressed on towards Benares, there were still engagements in which he might have suffered a crushing defeat. But he did not, and by February 1765 he had reached and taken the town of Allahabad.

The problems created by Munro's successes began to occupy the minds of the members of Council as soon as news reached them of the victory at Buxar. In November 1764, Vansittart had been replaced as governor by John Spenser, but there was little change in policy or in the general incompetence with which affairs were directed. The Council's first decision was that, if the *manab* of Oudh surrendered, he would have to cede Benares to the Company and give up Mir Kasim and Sumru. When he refused, they suggested that the whole of Oudh, with the exception of Benares, should be given to Shah Alam. This, or course, strongly appealed to the emperor, and the proposals were accepted. Munro was ordered to obtain the imperial grant of Benares for the Company and to ensure that, as Shah Alam took over Oudh, he paid the British out of the revenues for the expenses of the war.

Before much could be done to carry the agreements into practice, the *manab* reappeared on the scene, this time with new allies—the Marathas. But he found the Marathas dangerous friends and soon opened up negotiations to surrender to the British—which they gave little credence to, particularly as the *manab* was a virtual prisoner in the Maratha camp. Major Carnac, who had again taken over command of the British forces—in one of those recurring shuffles which happened whenever a new faction came to the top in Calcutta—moved to attack the *manab* and the Marathas, and met up with them

on May 3. In a sharp engagement the allies were defeated, and the *nawab* took the opportunity to escape the Marathas. Two weeks later, he again opened up negotiations and by the end of the month had surrendered to the British. The Marathas were defeated again, at another battle on May 22, and driven out of Oudh. The day on which Carnac first encountered the *nawab* and the Marathas had also been an important one in Calcutta. Robert Clive, Baron of Plassey, had returned to the scenes of his greatness.



known in Calcutta that Clive was returning as governor, and the subject was therefore shelved until his arrival.

One question, however, had been too important to be left unsettled. This concerned the demands for reimbursement of the losses sustained, not only by the Company but by individuals, as a result of the activities of Mir Kasim. The personal claims, originally set at £100,000, were raised to £530,000. The Company wanted £300,000, and Mir Jafar had promised £250,000 to the army and navy. Since Mir Kasim had taken most of the treasury with him, Mir Jafar was hard pressed. The revenues of the state were heavily in arrears, because of the atmosphere of uncertainty and anarchy. The Seths were no longer there to be squeezed. Though the murdered bankers had been succeeded by their sons, they too had been carried off by Mir Kasim and the banking house was in some disorder. It was by no means impoverished, for its ramifications were wide, but at least its new directors had some excuse for resisting the reinstated *namab's* demands for loans.

None of this had stopped the British, who had continued to do as they pleased. Sometimes they seized whole villages and diverted the revenue into their own pockets. They forced farmers to plant one crop instead of another. In spite of all the upheavals, nothing had really changed at all.

Mir Jafar agreed to pay some of the restitution on account, and the rest by instalments. When he heard that Clive was returning, he tried to postpone paying until after Clive arrived, but the British would not stand for this. The Directors in London knew nothing of the demands they had made on the *namab* and they suspected that Clive would not agree to them. In January 1765, while they were still engaged in pressuring the *namab*, an instruction arrived from London that none of the Company's servants was to accept gifts of more than Rs 4,000 in value. The British in Calcutta ignored this and increased the pressure on Mir Jafar.

Mir Jafar died on February 5. As soon as the British in Calcutta knew that he had fallen ill, a body of troops was sent to Murshidabad to keep the situation under control and, if necessary, ensure the safety of the treasury. On the day of Mir Jafar's death, Samuel Middleton, the British Resident in the capital, placed the *namab's* son, Najm-ud-daula, on the throne, but promptly received a communication from Calcutta declaring his action unauthorized and informing him that a delegation from Fort William was being sent to instal the new *namab* 'in a proper and public manner, that he as well

as the country may see that he receives his government from the Company'.

By February 20, the Committee in Calcutta had considered the possible candidates—who included Miran's son, Mir Jafar's grandson—and concluded that Najm-ud-daula would have to do. He was informed of the Committee's decision and presented with a treaty for signature. Its conditions were that he should reduce the number of his troops to the level of a personal bodyguard, a small corps for maintaining public order, and another for revenue collecting. His principal ministers and officials were to be appointed by the British, and all his communications with the Mughal emperor were to be channelled through the governor of Fort William. In every sense, Najm-ud-daula was to be a puppet.

The British wanted to appoint Muhammad Reza Khan, the governor of Dacca, as the *namah*'s deputy, and to divide the responsibility for revenue collection between Rai Durlabh and Nand Kumar, who had now been reinstated (possibly by the influence of bribery) in British favour. Their favour did not last long. It transpired that Nand Kumar without waiting for the British to announce their choice of successor, had applied to the emperor for confirmation of Najm-ud-daula as *namah*. He continued to act as though he were still chief minister and did all he could to prevent the British from finding out about the state of the treasury. The British warned him that this was not his business, but that of Muhammad Reza Khan. Finally, under pressure from the British who threatened to arrest Nand Kumar, the new *namah* dismissed him. The last figure to resist the British had now been removed. In the treaty with Najm-ud-daula, the British had not, of course, overlooked the opportunity of making some more money for themselves. The new *namah* had been forced to promise a gift of £140,000 to the governor and members of Council. The greater part of it was collected before Clive arrived.

Once Clive did arrive, he was not prepared to tolerate interference. At his first meeting with the Council he put its members firmly in their place, and left them, as he told Carnac, with 'very long and pale countenances'. Though he was not particularly welcomed by those who feared for their plunder, others hailed his arrival with a show of enthusiasm. Among these was Rai Durlabh, who wrote to him: 'As the parched earth is refreshed by the blessing of rain, and as the budding flower after the hard weather recovers its beauty and fragrance by the sweet breeze of spring, so has this news afforded relief to my anxious mind.' He probably meant every word of

it, for his position since Clive's departure had been less than comfortable.

Clive was anxious to settle matters with the Mughal emperor and the *nawab* of Oudh, as the situation could not be allowed to remain as it was for long without the possibility of its deteriorating to the disadvantage of the British. He could not, however, leave Calcutta immediately. Until he had established his authority there, seen the new *nawab* who had come there to meet him, and generally set things moving along the lines he wanted them to take, he had to leave other matters to take their course. On June 25, however, he left Calcutta for Allahabad, where Carnac had set up his headquarters. The main outlines of the settlements between the British and the emperor, and the British and the *nawab* of Oudh, had already been agreed by the parties concerned. When Clive arrived, the agreement was formally accepted. The *nawab* of Oudh was to have his territories back, except for the districts of Kora and Allahabad, which were to go to the emperor. A sum of Rs 5,000,000 was to be paid to the British, who were also to be given the right of duty-free trade in Oudh. The British agreed to withdraw their forces, except from the emperor's new territory, and the *nawab* was to enter into a defensive alliance with them.

It was a sensible solution. The British could not have managed the affairs of Oudh as well as those of Bengal. Though the opportunity of acquiring much of northern India had once again been presented to them, Clive, unlike Vansittart, knew that it was extremely foolish ever to consider it. 'To go further,' he wrote to the Directors on September 30, 'is in my opinion a scheme so extravagantly ambitious and absurd that no governor and Council in their senses can adopt it, unless the whole system of the Company's interest be first entirely new-modelled.' It was a decision that ran counter to his own imperial visions, but it did conform with the realities, and it was not the least of the contributions Clive made to the founding of British power in India.

As far as the emperor was concerned, if he could not be put back on his throne by the force of British arms, he could at least be given a base from which he might make the attempt himself. If he succeeded, Clive thought, perhaps he would remember who had given him the opportunity. As well as being allocated Kora and Allahabad in the treaty, the emperor was also guaranteed payment of the tribute from Bengal, which had lapsed during the revolutions. In return, he was to bestow the mysterious prestige of imperial approval on the position

of the British. They were to be granted the *dimanni*, the right of revenue collection, in Bengal. This legitimized the British presence and absorbed it firmly into the Indian tradition. In one sense it was the end of a dream which had been shared by the British and French, that of making a puppet of the Mughal emperor and pulling the strings that governed the whole of India. But before that could have been achieved, all India would have turned against them. Clive recognized that he and the British, for the time being at least, needed to make friends, not more enemies.

Having settled the frontiers, Clive turned to rationalizing the British position in Bengal. He had no intention of taking over direct administration of the revenue collection. Such a deed would have converted the British into a group which openly exercised power in Indian terms, and though Clive was not concerned with the Indian reaction to this—for, with the granting of the *dimanni*, the British position could not have been plainer in Indian eyes—he had no desire to antagonize the Dutch and the French, who still traded in Bengal with the tacit permission of the British. The Europeans, he thought, might make difficulties, not in Bengal but in Europe where an uneasy peace now reigned. Nor did he wish to excite the envy of the Company's enemies in England. Political jealousies could best be avoided by disguising the Company's power as far as possible.

Though, in formal terms, the administration of the Mughal provinces had been the responsibility of the governor, and the revenue the responsibility of another official—a device intended to maintain the balance of power—this system had lapsed in the chaos of the empire. By re-instituting the division and controlling the revenue collection, the British could make the governor entirely dependent on them for finance. By appointing an Indian, as their agent, to the *dimanni*, they could appear to hold no territory and thus divert the cupidity of others.

Clive's actions were politically valid, but the Company's continued dissociation from the actual administration was also necessary from a purely physical point of view. There were not enough Englishmen to take over the running of the country even if they had wanted to. In particular, there was a shortage of the right kind of Englishman. Clive had been very conscious of this during his first term as governor. After his experiences during the years he had been in England, it was even more obvious that some kind of reform in the Company's affairs was essential. Such reform could only come about if the role of the Company's servants was re-defined and strictly

controlled. The clash between the private interests of its employees and those of the Company had, by chance, created the Company's present dominant position in Bengal. But if the clash were allowed to continue it would not only undermine the commercial prosperity of the Company but also reduce the whole benefit of the new settlement, in the rest of India as well as in Bengal.

Clive's task was to stop the flow of gold into the pockets of the Company's servants, and his first target was what were politely known as 'gifts'. It might have been thought that Clive would feel handicapped in dealing with such a subject—after all, it was he who had started the flow, into his own pocket. Now, having made his fortune, he was back in India to prevent other people making theirs. The poacher turned gamekeeper is never a popular figure with other poachers. But Clive was unperturbed. For him, there was no comparison between his situation and that of lesser men. The lesser men did not hesitate to attack him on this very ground, but they did so with some subtlety—they questioned not his deeds but his authority. The Select Committee which Clive had been empowered to establish had been formed to bring about peace and stability. Once these had been achieved, its powers were supposed to devolve once more on the Fort William Council. This meant that any reform would fall into the hands of those very men who did not wish to be reformed, and Clive refused to accept the situation. 'Clive is really our king,' wrote one frightened member of Council. 'His word is law, and . . . he laughs at contradictions.'

Under great pressure and after many attempts at evasion, Clive managed to impose the Company's orders concerning presents, which had previously been ignored by the Council, and the Company's servants signed covenants agreeing to them. When four vacancies occurred in the Council—as a result of one suicide, one suspension, and two resignations—Clive refused to accept nominations from Calcutta and sent to Madras for men to fill them. This caused a minor rebellion. The rebels composed a memorial to be sent to the Directors in London and decided to ignore Clive and those members of the Select Committee who supported him. Clive reacted sharply. There were a number of dismissals from the Company's service, and duty-free passes were cancelled. This hit the rebels at their most vulnerable point, and they were soon back paying their respects to the governor.

Clive had no wish to penalize the Company's servants too rigorously. The problem had always been the Directors' unwillingness

to pay their employees a large, or even a reasonable, salary. A few pounds a year was enough, they implied, and the rest could be made up by private trade. Unfortunately, this private trade had become more extensive than the Company's. Clive would have liked to abolish private trading altogether, but the Directors could not accept the corollary of higher salaries. Clive's solution was, in August 1765, to establish a Society of Trade and award it the monopoly of commerce in salt. From the profits, the Company's senior servants would draw shares graded according to rank, the governor receiving £17,500 per annum, members of Council and colonels £7,000, and so on down the scale. Two years later, the Directors—who heartily disapproved of Clive's solution—abolished the society, but they did grant substantial salaries instead, so Clive's original intentions were in fact fulfilled. It was the beginning of a professional service without which no satisfactory dominion could have been exercised.

So far, Clive had met little more opposition to his reforms than angry words followed by humble submission. In the case of the Company's military forces, however, he was faced with dangerous insubordination. Relations between the civil authority and the military officers had always been uneasy, even at the best of times. As a rule, the military did much as they liked. Though Clive was commander-in-chief as well as civilian governor, his sympathies were plainly with the civil power. He had been ordered by the Directors to cut the military establishment as soon as practicable, and he had been particularly instructed to reduce expenditure by cutting what was known as 'double *batta*'. This was an allowance which Mir Jafar had made to the military as a kind of continuing gift. It was as unjustifiable as the presents to civilians. On the eve of Mir Kasim's offensive against the Company, an attempt had been made to stop it, but it was thought inadvisable to persist in the matter at that juncture. Now, however, it was peacetime.

The first reaction to Clive's order removing the double *batta* came in April 1765. One of his earlier reforms had been to reorganize the Company's forces into three brigades, each made up of a European battalion, a company of artillery, six sepoy battalions, and a troop of native cavalry. Two of the brigades were put under the command of officers who had seen service in the Carnatic, Robert Barker and Richard Smith. The third went to Robert Fletcher. Although he too had served in the Carnatic, he had been dismissed for insolence. Afterwards, he had tendered an apology and been reinstated. While

he was in England he had won the support of Laurence Sullivan and had come back to Bengal as Sullivan's nominee. Now, Fletcher wrote to Clive telling him that the officers of his brigade had decided to resign over the double *batta* issue. This was the tip of an iceberg of conspiracy between the army and some of the discontented civilians. An association had been formed to protect any of the brigade's officers from being sentenced to death for mutiny. A subscription of about £16,000 had been raised in Calcutta to help any officer who might be cashiered. It was obvious that there was to be a serious attempt to overthrow Clive's authority, and behind it all was the sinister figure of Fletcher, who had spent most of his time trying to acquire plunder, hang on to unjustified allowances, and claim for losses that had not occurred. Fletcher later claimed that he had joined the conspiracy only to learn all about it so that it might be crushed—but it was an unlikely story.

Clive once again reacted with vigour and decisiveness. It seemed that nothing brought out his particular talents more effectively than a desperate menace. The conspirators seemed to think that, as the Marathas had once more appeared on the scene near Allahabad, Clive would be compelled to give in to their demands in the interests of the security of Bengal. But they had totally misunderstood his character. 'I must see the soldiers' bayonets levelled at my throat,' he said, 'before I can be induced to give way.' He wrote to Madras for every officer that could be spared. The brigade commanders were ordered to send any officer who was even vaguely mutinous down to Calcutta. The European soldiers, following their officers, were mutinous too, and it looked as if all would depend on the sepoy battalions.

Clive moved by forced marches to where Fletcher's brigade was stationed at Monghyr. There, the officers who had come with him assembled the sepoys and used them to overawe the mutineers. The brigade was paraded and Clive spoke to the British soldiers, explaining his action over the double *batta*. The brigade, virtually deprived of its officers, was then moved into barracks. Once all was quiet at Monghyr, Clive went to the next military station at Patna and was able to restore order there. The officers who had been opposed to Clive seemed to have been overcome by indecision and were quarrelling among themselves. Instead of ordering them down to Calcutta, he offered them the chance of reinstatement which most of them accepted.

The problem of the third brigade was more complex. It was

located at Allahabad and another station and was, in effect, on active service. Here, resignation could reasonably be construed as desertion in the face of the enemy. Nevertheless, most of the officers were determined to resign. They would not listen to Richard Smith, their commander, and were apparently expecting to hear that Calcutta had given in to their demands. Instead, they heard that Clive was on the way. Most of them reconsidered their decision and Smith reinstated the least guilty among them. With this, the conspiracy collapsed.

Clive had no mercy on the men he believed had put the British presence in Bengal in jeopardy. Fletcher was court-martialled and cashiered, and so were others. They were fortunate, Clive reminded them, that he had not had them shot. When some of the officers who had been sent to Calcutta resisted arrest, he surrounded their houses with sepoys and forced them to give in. When they refused to go on board ships which would take them away from Bengal, they were carried aboard by force. Officers who had been reinstated were compelled to sign three-year agreements which made them liable to the death penalty if they repeated their misdemeanours.

There was bitter resentment in many quarters over Clive's actions, and even a threat of assassination. But he did not seem to be troubled. In fact, he felt that once the reckoning had been paid something ought to be done for the military, however bad their behaviour had been. Ordinarily, no provision had been made for men wounded in the Company's service and consequently unfit for duty. The Company had suggested that the officers themselves should contribute to a pension fund, but such a plan was not practicable. Clive decided that a legacy left to him by Mir Jafar should be put into a fund for the relief of invalid officers and for the widows of those killed. With this, his reforms were complete, and the Company's armed forces were set on a firm organizational base which included some provision for the welfare of officers and men.

Clive had finished what he had set out to achieve. The old depression returned and he fell ill with fever. He decided that he must return to England.

When Clive sailed from India in January 1767, he left behind him the foundations of an empire. There were to be many upheavals before a permanent building was erected upon them. The Company became insolvent and had to seek aid from the British government. It needed another era of reforms and another reformer, Warren Hastings, to give coherence and shape to Clive's visions of empire. But the importance of Clive's 'victory' at Plassey is established





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